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THE PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESS  
IN LITERATURE.

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THE PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESS  
IN LITERATURE. BY GEORGE  
HENRY LEWES.



ed, with an Introduction and Notes,  
y. T. SHARPER KNOWLSON.

LONDON: WALTER SCOTT, LTD.  
PATERNOSTER SQUARE.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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RUSKIN has somewhere observed that "the right law of education is to take the most pains with the best material." It was evidently some such law which guided those who were responsible for the education of George Henry Lewes. There was evidence enough of good material, and the pains to fashion it were not wanting. Born in London on April 18th, 1817, he first studied in a London school, and afterwards in Jersey and Brittany. This latter experience will account for his intimate acquaintance with idiomatic French; in some measure, too, it may explain certain Gallic tendencies in his character. Finally, Lewes studied under Dr. Burney at Greenwich, a school once renowned for its classical enthusiasm. To these advantages of early youth he added, in later years, the inestimable benefit of a prolonged residence in Germany.

On leaving school he was not at once successful in finding a congenial occupation. He first entered a notary's office; but routine work soon wearied him, and he left it to join the staff of a Russian merchant. Markets and prices, however, failed to interest him;

and having a deep love for science he turned his back on commerce and began to study medicine with the intention of qualifying for a degree. The dissecting rooms of those days were far from inviting, even to the most enthusiastic student, and Lewes found he could not stand the strain; somewhat reluctantly, therefore, he abandoned physic and anatomy. The next sphere was sought with appreciable diffidence.

Let us for a moment consider his position. A youth of twenty-one, mentally alert to an extraordinary degree, in sympathy with the prevailing philosophy, and affected by the new scientific spirit—there can be little wonder that law, commerce, and medicine should each in turn fail to satisfy him. The truth was he had caught the Teutonic contagion. Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* and his English renderings of Schiller, Goethe, and others, had been the means of introducing German literature to English minds; and it proved to be, in spite of its weaknesses, a revelation more marvellous than any since the days of the classical Renaissance. Lewes, ever sensitive to new movements, was profoundly impressed; and having conceived a desire to study in Germany, he left England for that purpose in 1838, not to return until 1840. This was the great formative period of his life.

Back again in London, Lewes commenced as a journalist and *littérateur*. Few men ever possessed better qualifications for the work. His versatility was astonishing. Literature, science, philosophy, the

drama, criticism—nothing came amiss to him. In addition to holding a minor post in the editorial department of the *Classical Review*, he was a frequent contributor to the *Morning Chronicle*, the *Athenæum*, the *Edinburgh*, the *Foreign Quarterly*, the *British Quarterly*, *Blackwood's*, *Fraser's*, and the *Westminster Review*. One of his earliest contributions is reprinted in this volume from the *British and Foreign Review* for 1842. In 1845-46 he published his *Biographical History of Philosophy* in four small volumes. It does not often happen that a historian of philosophy varies his reflections on phenomena and the *Ding an sich* by the pursuit of fiction and dramatic criticism; but Lewes, according to one who knew him, could "do everything, painting alone excepted; and he could do that, too, after a week's study." So in 1846 he brought out *The Spanish Drama*, and in 1847 *Ranthorpe*, a novel. The novel was not a great achievement, and yet Charlotte Brontë, in writing to the author, said of it, "In reading *Ranthorpe* I have read a new book, not a reprint, not a reflection of any other book, but a *new book*." Edgar Allan Poe also confessed that he had derived great consolation from its picture of literary character. Another novel, *Rose, Blanche, and Violet*, appeared in 1848, and contains a somewhat naïve preface on the difficulties he encountered in restraining a disposition to moralize, and thereby spoil the artistic symmetry of his work. From 1849 to 1854 Lewes edited the *Leader*, a weekly of uncertain fortunes, to which he contributed a story called *The Apprentice-*



*ship of Life*. He found time to write the *Life of Robespierre* (1849), and in the same year he published a play called *The Noble Heart*; followed later on by *The Game of Speculation*, *Buckstone's Adventures with a Polish Princess*, *A Cozy Couple*, *The Lawyers: A Comedy*, and several more, most of which were written under the *nom-de-plume* of "Slingsby Lawrence." In 1854 he went to Weimar, where he worked hard at his *Life and Works of Goethe*, begun so far back as 1845. Fortune did not favour him too generously in the production of this critical biography: his MS. was destined to travel the publishers' "round" until Mr. David Nutt exhibited the needful discernment, and put a valuable work into the hands of the public.

Science now came in for a share of attention. *Comte's Philosophy of the Sciences* appeared in 1853, and *Seaside Studies* in 1858; about which time he read a paper before the British Association on "The Spinal Cord as a Centre of Sensation and Volition." *The Physiology of Common Life* (1859), *Studies in Animal Life* (1862), and *Aristotle: A Chapter from the History of Science* (1864), all reveal the lover of scientific research. With the approach of the "eighteen seventies" his old passion for philosophy, literature, and the drama, reasserted itself, and we find him busy with his *Problems of Life and Mind* (1874-79). *Actors, and the Art of Acting* (1875) is a rather unusual book to write in the midst of philosophical studies, but Lewes had already written one book on the drama, and his criticisms contributed to

the *Leader* have been collected and republished.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, he was the grandson of a comedian, and had as early as 1841 taken the stage in Garrick's comedy, *The Guardian*. On many subsequent occasions—once in Edinburgh as Shylock—he took part in theatrical performances, and was by no means unsuccessful.

George Henry Lewes was unquestionably a man of many parts. What he said of Goethe was true of himself: he had a mind "greatly receptive and greatly productive." One critic's description is worth repeating. "He began life as a journalist, a critic, a novelist, a dramatist, a biographer, and an essayist; he closed it as a mathematician, a physicist, a chemist, a biologist, a psychologist, and the author of a system of abstract philosophy.") His researches in science and philosophy do not immediately concern us here, but it may be said that in both departments he did a great deal of useful work. The age needed a prophet to expound the new learning, and no one had the divine call of fitness in a higher degree than Lewes. But he was more than a mere expositor. His *Seaside Studies* contains the result of personal investigation at Ilfracombe, Tenby, and other places; in fact, all his scientific works are original in conception and execution. Biology especially attracted him, and in this field "he struck out a number of impressive suggestions, some of which have been accepted by physiologists at home and abroad. Of these the most valuable is that now known as the doctrine of

<sup>1</sup> *Dramatic Essays*, vol. iii. (London: Walter Scott, Limited).

the functional indifference of the nerves—that what are known as the specific energies of the optic, auditory, and other nerves, are simply differences in their mode of action due to the differences of the peripheral structures or sense organs with which they are connected. This idea has since been independently arrived at by Wundt (*Physiologische Psychologie*, 2nd ed., p. 321)."<sup>1</sup>

In philosophy his work was on a much larger scale. From the time that, in his "teens," he used to engage in discussions at a Metaphysical Club<sup>2</sup> in Red Lion Square, Holborn, up to his last days, he evinced a never-failing capacity for abstract speculation, a capacity which found an early and able expression in his *Biographical History of Philosophy*. He seems to have commenced his thinking on naturalistic lines, for we hear of him writing, at the age of eighteen, a physiological interpretation of the Scottish School of Philosophy. Residence in Germany altered his views somewhat, and for a time he was under the spell of Hegelianism, but under the influence of Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill, he was strongly influenced in favour of Positivism. The position taken up in the first edition of the *History of Philosophy* is distinctly Positive; although it is only fair to say that Lewes was never a blind partisan of this school. Later

<sup>1</sup> Sully, *Ency. Brit.*, Art. "Lewes." I am also indebted to Mr. Leslie Stephen's article in the *Nat. Dict. of Biography*, to Mathilde Blind's *George Eliot*, and to Professor F. N. Scott, of the University of Michigan.

<sup>2</sup> Lewes describes the club in the *Fortnightly* for 1866.

editions of the *History* show a modification of his views. He is less ready to condemn Plato and more willing to censure Aristotle. He found that the efficacies of the Positive method were neither so many nor so all-sufficing as he had at first imagined; and the avowed purpose of *Problems of Life and Mind* is to find a means for the combined working of metaphysic and science. In the *Biographical History*, that "admirable piece of synthetic criticism and exposition," as Mr. Frederic Harrison calls it, Lewes has provided the English reader with one of the most interesting narratives of the world's thought ever written. The four volumes of the *Problems* are of discursive utility; their perspicuous style and discriminating search after a true method render them attractive to every student.

In 1865 Lewes helped to launch the *Fortnightly Review*, and became its editor. To the first number he contributed the opening chapter of the *Principles of Success in Literature*. The others followed in due course. They are distinguished by the candour and ability which characterised all his writings; and although some of the chapters may show the journalist rather than the systematic thinker, it can still be said that, as a whole, no modern discussion of literary principles is so sound in treatment and stimulating in tone. The basis of excellence in literary style he conceived to be threefold: intellectual, moral, and æsthetic, corresponding to the principles of vision, sincerity, and beauty. It will be observed that in expounding these elements of good literature he never loses sight of the

writer's *personality*. Something of literary art every man may learn, but he does not attempt to raise false hopes of success by soft whistlings to the effect that genius is simply "hard work," or with Buffon that "it is a great capacity for patience." Nor does he assert with easy confidence that fiction, or any branch of imaginative literature may be "taught." That is a matter which depends on the *individual*; his capacity to see and feel, and his power to incarnate a vision in true artistic shape.

There are indications here and there that Lewes felt the limitations of his space. The later chapters on beauty are less vigorous than those which deal with vision and sincerity. And we should have liked to hear more about truth as the aim of literature. But these omissions are met, in part at least, by the article on *The Inner Life of Art*, which is an exposition of the philosophy of art as it concerns literature in general and poetry in particular. What Lewes says of the poet and the Idea is true of all literary workers. No one has expressed it better than Carlyle. "According to Fichte there is a 'divine idea' pervading the visible universe; which visible universe is indeed but its symbol and sensible manifestation, having in itself no meaning, or even true existence independent of it. To the mass of men this divine idea of the world lies hidden; yet to discern it, to seize it, and live wholly in it, is the condition of all genuine virtue, knowledge, and freedom; and the end, therefore, of all spiritual effort in every age. Literary men are the appointed interpreters of this divine

idea; a perpetual priesthood, we might say, standing forth generation after generation, as the dispensers and living types of God's everlasting wisdom, to shew it in their writings and actions, in such particular form as their own particular times require it in. For each age, by the law of its nature, is different from every other age, and demands a different representation of the divine idea, the essence of which is the same in all; so that the literary man of one century is only by mediation and reinterpretation applicable to the wants of another" (*Miscellanies*, i. p. 69).

In re-issuing *The Principles of Success in Literature*—a course, it might be mentioned, which was strongly advised by Anthony Trollope—there is the feeling that a twofold purpose has been accomplished. It would be commonplace to say that good material is thus rescued from oblivion: the fact is self-evident. The first end gained will be the provision of excellent guidance for literary ambition; excellent, because it is full of intellectual vigour and moral breeziness, and is not afraid to strike a disenchanting note. But whatever service may be rendered to the would-be writer, the benefit to an intelligent reader cannot, in any sense, be less.

T. SHARPER KNOWLSON.

# THE PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESS IN LITERATURE.

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## CHAPTER I.

CAUSES OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN LITERATURE,  
AND DIVISION OF THE SUBJECT.

### I. *Object of the Treatise.*

IN the development of the great series of animal organisms, the Nervous System assumes more and more of an imperial character. The rank held by any animal is determined by this character, and not at all by its bulk, its strength, or even its utility. In like manner, in the development of the social organism, as the life of nations becomes more complex, Thought assumes a more imperial character; and Literature, in its widest sense, becomes a delicate index of social evolution. Barbarous societies show only the germs of literary life. But advancing civilisation, bringing with it increased conquest over material agencies, disengages the mind from the pressure of immediate wants, and the loosened energy finds in leisure both

the demand and the means of a new activity: the demand, because long unoccupied hours have to be rescued from the weariness of inactivity; the means, because this call upon the energies nourishes a greater ambition and furnishes a wider arena.

Literature is at once the cause and the effect of social progress. It deepens our natural sensibilities, and strengthens by exercise our intellectual capacities. It stores up the accumulated experience of the race, connecting Past and Present into a conscious unity; and with this store it feeds successive generations, to be fed in turn by them. As its importance emerges into more general recognition, it necessarily draws after it a larger crowd of servitors, filling noble minds with a noble ambition.

There is no need in our day to be dithyrambic on the glory of Literature. Books have become our dearest companions, yielding exquisite delights and inspiring lofty aims. They are our silent instructors, our solace in sorrow, our relief in weariness. With what enjoyment we linger over the pages of some well-loved author! With what gratitude we regard every honest book! Friendships, profound and generous, are formed with men long dead, and with men whom we may never see. The lives of these men have a quite personal interest for us. Their homes become as consecrated shrines. Their little ways and familiar phrases become endeared to us, like the little ways and phrases of our wives and children.

It is natural that numbers who have once been



thrilled with this delight should in turn aspire to the privilege of exciting it. Success in Literature has thus become not only the ambition of the highest minds, it has also become the ambition of minds intensely occupied with other means of influencing their fellows—with statesmen, warriors, and rulers. Prime ministers and emperors have striven for distinction as poets, scholars, critics, and historians. Unsatisfied with the powers and privileges of rank, wealth, and their conspicuous position in the eyes of men; they have longed also for the nobler privilege of exercising a generous sway over the minds and hearts of readers. To gain this they have stolen hours from the pressure of affairs, and disregarded the allurements of luxurious ease, labouring steadfastly, hoping eagerly. Nor have they mistaken the value of the reward. Success in Literature is, in truth, the blue ribbon of nobility.

There is another aspect presented by Literature. It has become a profession: to many a serious and elevating profession; to many more a mere trade, having miserable trade-aims and trade-tricks. As in every other profession, the ranks are thronged with incompetent aspirants, without seriousness of aim, without the faculties demanded by their work. They are led to waste powers which in other directions might have done honest service, because they have failed to discriminate between aspiration and inspiration, between the desire for greatness and the consciousness of power. Still lower in the ranks are those who follow Literature simply because they see

no other opening for their incompetence; just as forlorn widows and ignorant old maids thrown suddenly on their own resources open a school—no other means of livelihood seeming to be within their reach. Lowest of all are those whose esurient vanity, acting on a frivolous levity of mind, urges them to make Literature a plaything for display. To write for a livelihood, even on a complete misapprehension of our powers, is at least a respectable impulse. To play at Literature is altogether inexcusable: the motive is vanity, the object notoriety, the end contempt.

I propose to treat of the Principles of Success in Literature, in the belief that if a clear recognition of the principles which underlie all successful writing could once be gained, it would be no inconsiderable help to many a young and thoughtful mind. Is it necessary to guard against a misconception of my object, and to explain that I hope to furnish nothing more than help and encouragement? There is help to be gained from a clear understanding of the conditions of success; and encouragement to be gained from a reliance on the ultimate victory of true principles. More than this can hardly be expected from me, even on the supposition that I have ascertained the real conditions. No one, it is to be presumed, will imagine that I can have any pretension of giving recipes for Literature, or of furnishing power and talent where nature has withheld them. I must assume the presence of the talent, and then assign the conditions under which that talent can alone

achieve real success. No man is made a discoverer by learning the principles of scientific Method; but only by those principles can discoveries be made; and if he has consciously mastered them, he will find them directing his researches and saving him from an immensity of fruitless labour. It is something in the nature of the Method of Literature that I propose to expound. Success is not an accident. All Literature is founded upon psychological laws, and involves principles which are true for all peoples and for all times. These principles we are to consider here.

## 2. *Success a Test of Merit.*

The rarity of good books in every department, and the enormous quantity of imperfect, insincere books, has been the lament of all times. The complaint being as old as Literature itself, we may dismiss without notice all the accusations which throw the burden on systems of education, conditions of society, cheap books, levity and superficiality of readers, and analogous causes. None of these can be a *vera causa*; though each may have had its special influence in determining the production of some imperfect works. The main cause I take to be that indicated in Goethe's aphorism: "In this world there are so few voices and so many echoes." Books are generally more deficient in sincerity than in cleverness. Talent, as will become apparent in the course of our inquiry, holds a very subordinate position in Literature to that usually assigned to it. Indeed, a cursory in-

spection of the Literature of our day will detect an abundance of remarkable talent—that is, of intellectual agility, apprehensiveness, wit, fancy, and power of expression—which is nevertheless impotent to rescue “clever writing” from neglect or contempt. It is unreal splendour; for the most part mere intellectual fireworks. In Life, as in Literature, our admiration for mere cleverness has a touch of contempt in it, and is very unlike the respect paid to character. And justly so. No talent can be supremely effective unless it act in close alliance with certain moral qualities. (What these qualities are will be specified hereafter.<sup>1</sup>)

Another cause, intimately allied with the absence of moral guidance just alluded to, is *misdirection* of talent. Valuable energy is wasted by being misdirected. Men are constantly attempting, without special aptitude, work for which special aptitude is indispensable.

“On peut être honnête homme et faire mal des vers.”<sup>2</sup>

A man may be variously accomplished, and yet be a feeble poet. He may be a real poet, yet a feeble dramatist. He may have dramatic faculty, yet be a feeble novelist. He may be a good story-teller, yet a shallow thinker and a slipshod writer. For success in any special kind of work it is obvious that a special talent is requisite; but obvious as this seems, when stated as a general proposition, it

<sup>1</sup> See, in particular, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> Molière, *Le Misanthrope*, Act IV., Sc. i.

rarely serves to check a mistaken presumption. There are many writers endowed with a certain susceptibility to the graces and refinements of Literature which has been fostered by culture till they have mistaken it for native power; and these men, being really destitute of native power, are forced to imitate what others have created. They can understand how a man may have musical sensibility and yet not be a good singer; but they fail to understand, at least in their own case, how a man may have literary sensibility, yet not be a good storyteller or an effective dramatist. They imagine that if they are cultivated and clever, can write what is delusively called a "brilliant style," and are familiar with the masterpieces of Literature, they must be more competent to succeed in fiction or the drama than a duller man, with a plainer style and slenderer acquaintance with the "best models." Had they distinctly conceived the real aims of Literature this mistake would often have been avoided. A recognition of the aims would have pressed on their attention a more distinct appreciation of the requirements.

No one ever doubted that special aptitudes were required for music, mathematics, drawing, or for wit; but other aptitudes not less special are seldom recognised. It is with authors as with actors: mere delight in the art deludes them into the belief that they could be artists. There are born actors, as there are born authors. To an observant eye such men reveal their native endowments. Even in

conversation they spontaneously throw themselves into the characters they speak of. They mimic, often quite unconsciously, the speech and gesture of the person. They dramatise when they narrate. Other men with little of this faculty, but with only so much of it as will enable them to imitate the tones and gestures of some admired actor, are misled by their vanity into the belief that they also are actors, that they also could move an audience as their original moves it.

In Literature we see a few original writers, and a crowd of imitators: men of special aptitudes, and men who mistake their power of repeating with slight variation what others have done, for a power of creating anew. The imitator sees that it is easy to do that which has already been done. He intends to improve on it; to add from his own stores something which the originator could not give; to lend it the lustre of a richer mind; to make this situation more impressive, and that character more natural. He is vividly impressed with the imperfections of the original. And it is a perpetual puzzle to him why the public, which applauds his imperfect predecessor, stupidly fails to recognise his own obvious improvements.

It is from such men that the cry goes forth about neglected genius and public caprice. In secret they despise many a distinguished writer, and privately, if not publicly, assert themselves as immeasurably superior. The success of a Dumas is to them a puzzle and an irritation. They do not understand

that a man becomes distinguished in virtue of some special talent properly directed; and that their obscurity is due either to the absence of a special talent, or to its misdirection. They may probably be superior to Dumas in general culture, or various ability; it is in particular ability that they are his inferiors. They may be conscious of wider knowledge, a more exquisite sensibility, and a finer taste more finely cultivated; yet they have failed to produce any impression on the public in a direction where the despised favourite has produced a strong impression. They are thus thrown upon the alternative of supposing that he has had "the luck" denied to them, or that the public taste is degraded and prefers trash. Both opinions are serious mistakes. Both injure the mind that harbours them.

In how far is success a test of merit? Rigorously considered, it is an absolute test. Nor is such a conclusion shaken by the undeniable fact that temporary applause is often secured by works which have no lasting value. For we must always ask, What is the nature of the applause, and from what circles does it rise? A work which appears at a particular juncture, and suits the fleeting wants of the hour, flattering the passions of the hour, may make a loud noise, and bring its author into strong relief. This is not luck, but a certain fitness between the author's mind and the public needs. He who first seizes the occasion, may be for general purposes intrinsically a feeble man than many who stand

listless or hesitating till the moment be passed; but in Literature, as in Life, a sudden promptitude outrivals vacillating power.

Generally speaking, however, this promptitude has but rare occasions for achieving success. We may lay it down as a rule that no work ever succeeded, even for a day, but it deserved that success; no work ever failed but under conditions which made failure inevitable. This will seem hard to men who feel that in their case neglect arises from prejudice or stupidity. Yet it is true even in extreme cases; true even when the work once neglected has since been acknowledged superior to the works which for a time eclipsed it. Success, temporary or enduring, is the measure of the relation, temporary or enduring, which exists between a work and the public mind. The millet seed may be intrinsically less valuable than a pearl; but the hungry cock wisely neglected the pearl, because pearls could not, and millet seeds could, appease his hunger. Who shall say how much of the subsequent success of a once neglected work is due to the preparation of the public mind through the works which for a time eclipsed it?

Let us look candidly at this matter. It interests us all; for we have all more or less to contend against public misconception, no less than against our own defects. The object of Literature is to instruct, to animate, or to amuse. Any book which does one of these things succeeds; any book which does none of these things fails. Failure is the indication of an inability to perform what was attempted: the aim



was misdirected, or the arm was too weak: in either case the mark has not been hit.

"The public taste is degraded." Perhaps so; and perhaps not. But in granting a want of due preparation in the public, we only grant that the author has missed his aim. A reader cannot be expected to be interested in ideas which are not presented intelligibly to him, nor delighted by art which does not touch him; and for the writer to imply that he furnishes arguments, but does not pretend to furnish brains to understand the arguments, is arrogance. What Goethe says<sup>1</sup> about the most legible handwriting being illegible in the twilight, is doubtless true; and should be oftener borne in mind by frivolous objectors, who declare they do not understand this or do not admire that, as if their want of taste and understanding were rather creditable than otherwise, and were decisive proofs of an author's insignificance. But this reproof, which is telling against individuals, has no justice as against the public. For—and this is generally lost sight of—the public is composed of the class or classes directly addressed by any work, and not of the heterogeneous mass of readers. Mathematicians do not write for the circulating library. Science is not addressed to poets. Philosophy is meant for students, not for idle readers. If the members of a class do not understand,—if those directly addressed fail to listen, or listening, fail to recognise a power in the voice,—surely the fault lies with the speaker, who, having attempted to secure

<sup>1</sup> *Sprüche in Prosa*, Kunst, V., 705.

their attention and enlighten their understandings, has failed in the attempt. The mathematician who is without value to mathematicians, the thinker who is obscure or meaningless to thinkers, the dramatist who fails to move the pit, may be wise, may be eminent, but as an author he has failed. He attempted to make his wisdom and his power operate on the minds of others. He has missed his mark. *Margaritas ante porcos!* is the soothing maxim of a disappointed self-love. But we, who look on, may sometimes doubt whether they *were* pearls thus ineffectually thrown; and always doubt the judiciousness of strewing pearls before swine.

The prosperity of a book lies in the minds of readers. Public knowledge and public taste fluctuate; and there come times when works which were once capable of instructing and delighting thousands lose their power, and works, before neglected, emerge into renown. A small minority to whom these works appealed has gradually become a large minority, and in the evolution of opinion will perhaps become the majority. No man can pretend to say that the work neglected to-day will not be a household word to-morrow; or that the pride and glory of our age will not be covered with cobwebs on the bookshelves of our children. Those works alone can have enduring success which successfully appeal to what is permanent in human nature—which, while suiting the taste of the day, contain truths and beauty deeper than the opinions and tastes of the day; but even temporary

success implies a certain temporary fitness.<sup>1</sup> In Homer, Sophocles, Dante, Shakespeare, Cervantes, we are made aware of much that no longer accords with the wisdom or the taste of our day,—temporary and immature expressions of fluctuating opinions,—but we are also aware of much that is both true and noble now, and will be so for ever.

It is only posterity that can decide whether the success or failure shall be enduring; for it is only posterity that can reveal whether the relation now existing between the work and the public mind is or is not liable to fluctuation. Yet no man really writes for posterity; no man ought to do so.

“Wer machte denn der Mitwelt Spass?”

(“Who is to amuse the present?”) asks the wise Merry Andrew in *Faust*.<sup>2</sup> We must leave posterity to choose its own idols. There is, however, this chance in favour of any work which has once achieved success, that what has pleased one generation may

<sup>1</sup> It not infrequently happens that new ideas for which the public is hungry, it knows not why, are embodied in inferior works. Readers find in such writings what they seek in vain in more finished productions. The enthusiasm with which Wordsworth read the sonnets of so undeniably second-rate a mind as that of Bowles, finds its explanation in the fact that the latter poet, despite his mediocrity, had embodied in his commonplace lines some of the new ideas about nature with which Rousseau had stirred the heart of Europe. See *Coleridge's Principles of Criticism*, by A. J. George, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Vorspiel auf dem Theater*, I. 77. The force of the quotation is lost without the preceding lines—

“Wenn ich nur nichts von Nachwelt hören sollte!  
Gesetzt, dass ich von Nachwelt reden wollte,  
Wer machte denn der Mitwelt Spass?”

please another, because it may be based upon a truth or beauty which cannot die; and there is this chance against any work which has once failed, that its unfitness may be owing to some falsehood or imperfection which cannot live.

### 3. *Causes of Failure.*

In urging all writers to be steadfast in reliance on the ultimate victory of excellence, we should no less strenuously urge upon them to beware of the intemperate arrogance which attributes failure to a degraded condition of the public mind. The instinct which leads the world to worship success is not dangerous. The book which succeeds accomplishes its aim. The book which fails may have many excellencies, but they must have been misdirected. Let us, however, understand what is meant by failure. For want of a clear recognition of this meaning, many a serious writer has been made bitter by the reflection that shallow, feeble works have found large audiences, whereas his own work has not paid the printing expenses. He forgets that the readers who found instruction and amusement in the shallow books could have found none in his book, because he had not the art of making his ideas intelligible and attractive to them, or had not duly considered what food was assimilable by their minds. It is idle to write in hieroglyphics for the mass when only priests can read the sacred symbols.

No one, it is hoped, will suppose that by what is

here said I countenance the notion which is held by some authors—a notion implying either arrogant self-sufficiency or mercenary servility—that to succeed, a man should write down to the public. Quite the reverse. To succeed, a man should write up to his ideal. He should do his very best; certain that the very best will still fall short of what the public can appreciate. He will only degrade his own mind by putting forth works avowedly of inferior quality; and will find himself greatly surpassed by writers whose inferior workmanship has nevertheless the indefinable aspect of being the best they can produce. The man of common mind is more directly in sympathy with the vulgar public, and can speak to it more intelligibly, than any one who is condescending to it. If you feel yourself to be above the mass, speak so as to raise the mass to the height of your argument. It may be that the interval is too great. It may be that the nature of your arguments is such as to demand from the audience an intellectual preparation, and a habit of concentrated continuity of thought, which cannot be expected from a miscellaneous assembly. The scholarship of a Scaliger or the philosophy of a Kant will obviously require an audience of scholars and philosophers. And in cases where the nature of the work limits the class of readers, no man should complain if the readers he does not address pass him by to follow another. He will not allure these by writing down to them; or if he allure them, he will lose those who properly constitute his real audience.

A writer misdirects his talent if he lowers his standard of excellence. Whatever he can do best let him do that, certain of reward in proportion to his excellence. The reward is not always measurable by the number of copies sold; that simply measures the extent of his public. It may prove that he has stirred the hearts and enlightened the minds of many. It may also prove, as Johnson says, "that his nonsense suits their nonsense." The real reward of Literature is in the sympathy of congenial minds, and is precious in proportion to the elevation of those minds, and the gravity with which such sympathy moves: the admiration of a mathematician for the *Mécanique Céleste*, for example, is altogether higher in kind than the admiration of a novel reader for the last "delightful story." And what should we think of Laplace if he were made bitter by the wider popularity of Dumas? Would he forfeit the admiration of one philosopher for that of a thousand novel readers?

To ask this question is to answer it; yet daily experience tells us that not only in lowering his standard, but in running after a popularity incompatible with the nature of his talent, does many a writer forfeit his chance of success. The novel and the drama, by reason of their commanding influence over a large audience, often seduce writers to forsake the path on which they could labour with some success, but on which they know that only a very small audience can be found; as if it were quantity more than quality, noise rather than appreciation,

which their mistaken desires sought. Unhappily for them, they lose the substance, and only snap at the shadow. The audience may be large, but it will not listen to them. The novel may be more popular and more lucrative, when successful, than the history or the essay; but to make it popular and lucrative the writer needs a special talent, and this, as was before hinted, seems frequently forgotten by those who take to novel writing. Nay, it is often forgotten by the critics; they being, in general, men without the special talent themselves, set no great value on it. They imagine that Invention may be replaced by culture, and that clever "writing" will do duty for dramatic power. They applaud the "drawing" of a character, which drawing turns out on inspection to be little more than an epigrammatic enumeration of particularities, the character thus "drawn" losing all individuality as soon as speech and action are called upon. Indeed, there are two mistakes very common among reviewers: one is the over-valuation of what is usually considered as literary ability ("brilliant writing" it is called; "literary tinsel" would be more descriptive) to the prejudice of Invention and Individuality; the other is the over-valuation of what they call "solid acquirements," which really mean no more than an acquaintance with the classics. As a fact, literary ability and solid acquirements are to be had in abundance; invention, humour, and originality are excessively rare. It may be a painful reflection to those who, having had a great deal of money spent on their

education, and having given a great deal to their solid acquirements, now see the original power of all kinds more esteemed than learning; but they should reflect that what is sur- ing now is only the diffused form of what was simply invention. "Solid acquirement" is the ger- wits become the wisdom of reviewers.

#### 4. *The Three Laws of Literature.*

Authors are styled an irritable race, and justly, if the epithet be understood in its physiological rather than its moral sense. This irritability, which responds to the slightest stimulus, leads to much of the mis- direction of talent we have been considering. The greatness of an author consists in having a mind extremely irritable,<sup>1</sup> and at the same time steadfastly imperial:—irritable that no stimulus may be inopera- tive, even in its most evanescent solicitations; imperial, that no solicitation may divert him from his deliberately chosen aims. A magisterial subjec- tion of all dispersive influences, a concentration of the mind upon the thing that has to be done, and a proud renunciation of all means of effect which do not spontaneously connect themselves with it—these are the rare qualities which mark out the man of genius. In men of lesser calibre the mind is more constantly open to determination from extrinsic influences. Their movement is not self-determined,

<sup>1</sup> "Susceptible" would perhaps be a better word. For the other kind of irritability see D'Israeli's *Literary Character of Men of Genius*, p. 86.



which is gained. In men of still smaller calibre the *therus* entirely determined by extrinsic influences. *shaz* are prompted to write poems by no musical *not* et, but simply because great poems have en-  
dared the world. They resolve to write novels or the vulgarest provocations: they see novels *thging* money and fame; they think there is no *biculty* in the art. The novel will afford them an *wortunity* of bringing in a variety of scattered details; scraps of knowledge too scanty for an essay, and scraps of experience too meagre for independent publication. Others, again, attempt histories, or works of popular philosophy and sciences; not because they have any special stores of knowledge, or because any striking novelty of conception urges them to use up old material in a new *shaze*, but simply because they have just been reading with interest some work of history or science, and are impatient to impart to others the knowledge they have just acquired for themselves. Generally it may be remarked that the pride which follows the sudden emancipation of the mind from ignorance of any subject, is accompanied by a feeling that all the world must be in the state of darkness from which we have ourselves emerged. It is the knowledge learned yesterday which is most freely imparted to-day.

We need not insist on the obvious fact of there being more irritability than mastery, more imitation than creation, more echoes than voices in the world of Literature. Good writers are of necessity rare. But the ranks would be less crowded with incom-

petent writers if men of real ability were his. often misdirected in their aims. My object is to define, if possible, the Principles of Success—not to supply recipes for absent power, but to expound the laws through which power is efficient, and to explain the causes which determine success in exact proportion to the native power on the one hand, and to the state of public opinion on the other.

The Laws of Literature may be grouped under three heads. Perhaps we might say they are three forms of one principle. They are founded on our threefold nature—intellectual, moral, and æsthetic.

*The intellectual form is the Principle of Vision.*

*The moral form is the Principle of Sincerity.*

*The æsthetic form is the Principle of Beauty.*

It will be my endeavour to give definite significance, in succeeding chapters, to these expressions, which, standing unexplained and unillustrated, probably convey very little meaning. We shall then see that every work, no matter what its subject-matter, necessarily involves these three principles in varying degrees; and that its success is always strictly in accordance with its conformity to the guidance of these principles.

Unless a writer has what, for the sake of brevity, I have called Vision, enabling him to see clearly the facts or ideas, the objects or relations, which he places before us for our own instruction, his work must obviously be defective. He must see clearly if we are to see clearly. Unless a writer has Sincerity, urging him to place before us what he

we sustain believes as he sees and believes it, the sincere earnestness of his presentation will cause imperfect sympathy in us. He must believe what he says, or we shall not believe it. Insincerity is always weakness; sincerity even in error is strength. This is not so obvious a principle as the first; at any rate it is one more profoundly disregarded by writers.

Finally, unless the writer has grace—the principle of Beauty I have named it—enabling him to give some æsthetic charm to his presentation, were it only the charm of well-arranged material and well-constructed sentences, a charm sensible through all the intricacies of *composition*<sup>1</sup> and of *style*, he will not do justice to his powers, and will either fail to make his work acceptable, or will very seriously limit its success. The amount of influence issuing from this principle of Beauty will, of course, be greatly determined by the more or less æsthetic nature of the work.

Books minister to our knowledge, to our guidance, and to our delight, by their truth, their uprightness, and their art. Truth is the aim of Literature. Sincerity is moral truth. Beauty is æsthetic truth. How rigorously these three principles determine the success of all works whatever, and how rigorously every departure from them, no matter how slight, determines proportional failure, with the inexorable sequence of a physical law, it will be my endeavour to prove in the chapters which are to follow.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 131.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE PRINCIPLE OF VISION.

#### I. *Value of Insight and Personal Experience.*

ALL good Literature rests primarily on insight. All bad Literature rests upon imperfect insight, or upon imitation, which may be defined as seeing at second-hand.

There are men of clear insight who never become authors: some, because no sufficient solicitation from internal or external impulses makes them bend their energies to the task of giving literary expression to their thoughts; and some, because they lack the adequate powers of literary expression. But no man, be his felicity and facility of expression what they may, ever produces good Literature unless he sees for himself, and sees clearly. It is the very claim and purpose of Literature to show others what they failed to see. Unless a man sees this clearly for himself, how can he show it to others?

Literature delivers tidings of the world within and the world without. It tells of the facts which have been witnessed, reproduces the emotions which have been felt. It places before the reader symbols which represent the absent facts, or the relations of these to

other facts; and by the vivid presentation of the symbols of emotion kindles the emotive sympathy of readers. The art of selecting the fitting symbols, and of so arranging them as to be intelligible and kindling, distinguishes the great writer from the great thinker; it is an art which also relies on clear insight.

The value of the tidings brought by Literature is determined by their authenticity. At all times the air is noisy with rumours, but the real business of life is transacted on clear insight and authentic speech. False tidings and idle rumours may for an hour clamorously usurp attention, because they are believed to be true; but the cheat is soon discovered, and the rumour dies. In like manner Literature which is authentic may succeed as long as it is believed to be true: that is, so long as our intellects have not discovered the falseness of its pretensions, and our feelings have not disowned sympathy with its expressions. These may be truisms, but they are constantly disregarded. Writers have seldom any steadfast conviction that it is of primary necessity for them to deliver tidings about what they themselves have seen and felt. Perhaps their intimate consciousness assures them that what they have seen or felt is neither new nor important. It may not be new, it may not be intrinsically important; nevertheless, if authentic, it has its value, and a far greater value than anything reported by them at second-hand. We cannot demand from every man that he have unusual depth of insight or exceptional experience; but we demand of him that

he give us of his best, and his best cannot be another's. The facts seen through the vision of another, reported on the witness of another, may be true, but the reporter cannot vouch for them. Let the original observer speak for himself. Otherwise only rumours are set afloat. If you have never seen an acid combine with a base, you cannot instructively speak to me of salts; and this, of course, is true in a more emphatic degree with reference to more complex matters.

Personal experience is the basis of all real Literature. The writer must have thought the thoughts, seen the objects (with bodily or mental vision), and felt the feelings; otherwise he can have no power over us. Importance does not depend on rarity so much as on authenticity. The massacre of a distant tribe, which is heard through the report of others, falls far below the heart-shaking effect of a murder committed in our presence. Our sympathy with the unknown victim may originally have been as torpid as that with the unknown tribe; but it has been kindled by the swift and vivid suggestions of details visible to us as spectators; whereas a severe and continuous effort of imagination is needed to call up the kindling suggestions of the distant massacre.

So little do writers appreciate the importance of direct vision and experience, that they are in general silent about what they themselves have seen and felt, copious in reporting the experience of others. Nay, they are urgently prompted to say what they know others think, and what consequently they themselves

may be expected to think. They are as if dismayed at their own individuality, and suppress all traces of it in order to catch the general tone. Such men may, indeed, be of service in the ordinary commerce of Literature as distributors. All I wish to point out is that they are distributors, not producers. The commerce may be served by second-hand reporters, no less than by original seers; but we must understand this service to be commercial, and not literary. The common stock of knowledge gains from it no addition. The man who detects a new fact, a new property in a familiar substance, adds to the science of the age; but the man who expounds the whole system of the universe on the reports of others, unenlightened by new conceptions of his own, does not add a grain to the common store. Great writers may all be known by their solicitude about authenticity. A common incident, a simple phenomenon, which has been a part of their experience, often undergoes what may be called "a transfiguration" in their souls, and issues in the form of Art; while many world-agitating events in which they have not been actors, or majestic phenomena of which they were never spectators, are by them left to the unhesitating incompetence of writers who imagine that fine subjects make fine works. Either the great writer leaves such materials untouched, or he employs them as the vehicle of more cherished, because more authenticated, tidings,—he paints the ruin of an empire as the scenic background for his picture of the distress of two simple hearts. The inferior writer, because he lays no emphasis on

authenticity, cannot understand this avoidance of imposing themes. Condemned by native incapacity to be a reporter, and not a seer, he hopes to shine by the reflected glory of his subjects. It is natural in him to mistake ambitious art for high art. He does not feel that the best<sup>1</sup> is the highest.

I do not assert that inferior writers abstain from the familiar and trivial. On the contrary, as imitators, they imitate everything which great writers have shown to be sources of interest. But their bias is towards great subjects. They make no new ventures in the direction of personal experience. They are silent on all that they have really seen for themselves. Unable to see the deep significance of what is common, they spontaneously turn towards the uncommon.

There is, at the present day, a fashion in Literature, and in Art generally, which is very deplorable, and which may, on a superficial glance, appear at variance with what has just been said. The fashion is that of coat-and-waistcoat realism, a creeping timidity of invention, moving almost exclusively amid scenes of drawing-room existence, with all the reticences and pettinesses of drawing-room conventions. Artists have become photographers, and have turned the camera upon the vulgarities of life, instead of representing the more impassioned movements of life. The majority of books and pictures are addressed to our lower faculties; they make no effort as they have no power to stir our deeper emotions by the contagion of

<sup>1</sup> That is, "the best of its kind," or "the best that the artist can do."



great ideas. Little that makes life noble and solemn is reflected in the Art of our day; to amuse a languid audience seems its highest aim. Seeing this, some of my readers may ask whether the artists have not been faithful to the law I have expounded, and chosen to paint the small things they have seen, rather than the great things they have not seen? The answer is simple. For the most part the artists have *not* painted what they have seen, but have been false and conventional in their pretended realism. And whenever they have painted truly, they have painted successfully. The authenticity of their work has given it all the value which in the nature of things such work could have. Titian's portrait of "The Young Man with a Glove" is a great work of art, though not of great art. It is infinitely higher than a portrait of Cromwell, by a painter unable to see into the great soul of Cromwell, and to make us see it; but it is infinitely lower than Titian's "Tribute Money," "Peter the Martyr," or the "Assumption." Tennyson's "Northern Farmer" is incomparably greater as a poem than Mr. Bailey's ambitious "Festus"; but the "Northern Farmer" is far below "Ulysses" or "Guinevere," because moving on a lower level, and recording the facts of a lower life.

Insight is the first condition of Art. Yet many a man who has never been beyond his village will be silent about that which he knows well, and will fancy himself called upon to speak of the tropics or the Andes—on the reports of others. Never having seen a greater man than the parson and the squire—and

not having seen into them—he selects Cromwell and Plato, Raphael and Napoleon, as his models, in the vain belief that these impressive personalities will make his work impressive. Of course, I am speaking figuratively. By “never having been beyond his village,” I understand a mental no less than topographical limitation. The penetrating sympathy of genius will, even from a village, traverse the whole world. What I mean is, that unless by personal experience, no matter through what avenues, a man has gained clear insight into the facts of life, he cannot successfully place them before us; and whatever insight he *has* gained, be it of important or of unimportant facts, will be of value if truly reproduced. No sunset is precisely similar to another, no two souls are affected by it in a precisely similar way. Thus may the commonest phenomenon have a novelty. To the eye that can read aright there is an infinite variety even in the most ordinary human being.<sup>1</sup> But to the careless, indiscriminating eye all individuality is merged in a misty generality. Nature and men yield

<sup>1</sup> “These commonplace people—many of them—bear a conscience, and have felt the sublime prompting to do the painful right; they have their unspoken sorrows, and their sacred joys; their hearts have perhaps gone out towards their first-born, and they have mourned over the irreclaimable dead. Nay, is there not a pathos in their very insignificance—in our comparison of their dim and narrow existence with the glorious possibilities of that human nature which they share? Depend upon it, you would gain unspeakably if you would learn with me to see some of the poetry and pathos, the tragedy and comedy, lying in the experience of a human soul that looks out through dull grey eyes, and that speaks in a voice of quite ordinary tones.”—GEORGE ELIOT, *Amos Barton*.

nothing new to such a mind. Of what avail is it for a man to walk out into the tremulous mists of morning, to watch the slow sunset, and wait for the rising stars, if he can tell us nothing about these but what others have already told us—if he feels nothing but what others have already felt? Let a man look for himself and tell truly what he sees. We will listen to that. We must listen to it, for its very authenticity has a subtle power of compulsion. What others have seen and felt we can learn better from their own lips.

## 2. *Psychology of Mental Vision.*

I have not yet explained in any formal manner what the nature of that insight is which constitutes what I have named the Principle of Vision; although doubtless the reader has gathered its meaning from the remarks already made. For the sake of future applications of the principle to the various questions of philosophical criticism which must arise in the course of this inquiry, it may be needful here to explain (as I have already explained elsewhere)<sup>1</sup> how the chief intellectual operations—Perception, Inference, Reasoning, and Imagination—may be viewed as so many forms of mental vision.

Perception, as distinguished from Sensation, is the presentation before Consciousness of the details which once were present in conjunction with the object at this moment affecting Sense. These details are in-

<sup>1</sup> *History of Philosophy*, Introduction. Cf. also *Problems of Life and Mind*, 1st Series, Problem I., Chap. III.

ferred to be still in conjunction with the object, although not revealed to Sense. Thus when an apple is perceived by me, who merely see it, all that Sense reports is of a certain coloured surface: the roundness, the firmness, the fragrance, and the taste of the apple are not present to Sense, but are made present to Consciousness by the act of Perception. The eye sees a certain coloured surface; the mind sees at the same instant many other co-existent but unapparent facts—it reinstates in their due order these unapparent facts. Were it not for this mental vision supplying the deficiencies of ocular vision, the coloured surface would be an enigma. But the suggestion of Sense rapidly recalls the experiences previously associated with the object. The apparent facts disclose the facts that are unapparent.

Inference is only a higher form of the same process. We look from the window, see the dripping leaves and the wet ground, and infer that rain has fallen. It is on inferences of this kind that all knowledge depends. The extension of the known to the unknown, of the apparent to the unapparent, gives us Science. Except in the grandeur of its sweep, the mind pursues the same course in the interpretation of geological facts as in the interpretation of the ordinary incidents of daily experience. To read the pages of the great Stone Book, and to perceive from the wet streets that rain has recently fallen, are forms of the same intellectual process. In the one case the inference traverses immeasurable spaces of time, connecting the apparent

facts with causes (unapparent facts) similar to those which have been associated in experience with such results; in the other case the inference connects wet streets and swollen gutters with causes which have been associated in experience with such results. Let the inference span with its mighty arch a myriad of years, or link together the events of a few minutes, in each case the arch rises from the ground of familiar facts, and reaches an antecedent which is known to be a cause capable of producing them.

The mental vision by which in Perception we see the unapparent details—*i.e.*, by which sensations formerly co-existing with the one now affecting us are reinstated under the form of ideas which *represent* the objects—is a process implied in all Ratiocination, which also presents an *ideal series*, such as would be a series of sensations, if the objects themselves were before us. A chain of reasoning is a chain of inferences: *ideal* presentations of objects and relations not apparent to Sense, or not presentable to Sense. Could we realise all the links in this chain, by placing the objects in their actual order as a *visible* series, the reasoning would be a succession of perceptions. Thus the path of a planet is seen by reason to be an ellipse. It would be perceived as a fact, if we were in a proper position and endowed with the requisite means of following the planet in its course; but not having this power, we are reduced to infer the unapparent points in its course from the points which are apparent. We see them mentally. Correct reasoning is the ideal assemblage of objects in their actual order of co-exist-

ence and succession. It is seeing with the mind's eye. False reasoning is owing to some misplacement of order of objects, or to the omission of some links in the chain, or to the introduction of objects not properly belonging to the series. It is distorted or defective vision. The terrified traveller sees a highwayman in what is really a sign-post in the twilight; and in the twilight of knowledge, the terrified philosopher sees a pestilence foreshadowed by an eclipse.

Let attention also be called to one great source of error, which is also a great source of power, namely, that much of our thinking is carried on by signs instead of images. We use words as signs of objects; these suffice to carry on the train of inference, when very few images of the objects are called up. Let any one attend to his thoughts and he will be surprised to find how rare and indistinct in general are the images of objects which arise before his mind. If he says, "I shall take a cab and get to the railway by the shortest cut," it is ten to one that he forms no image of cab or railway, and but a very vague image of the streets through which the shortest cut will lead. Imaginative minds see images where ordinary minds see nothing but signs: this is a source of power; but it is also a source of weakness; for in the practical affairs of life, and in the theoretical investigations of philosophy, a too active imagination is apt to distract the attention and scatter the energies of the mind.

In complex trains of thought signs are indispens-

facts w. The images, when called up, are only vanishing  
which suggestions: they disappear before they are more  
than half formed. And yet it is because signs  
are thus substituted for images (paper transacting  
the business of money) that we are so easily imposed  
upon by verbal fallacies and meaningless phrases.  
A scientific man of some eminence was once taken  
in by a wag, who gravely asked him whether he had  
read Bunsen's paper on the *malleability* of light. He  
confessed that he had not read it: "Bunsen sent it to  
me, but I've not had time to look into it."

The degree in which each mind habitually substitutes signs for images will be, *ceteris paribus*, the degree in which it is liable to error. This is not contradicted by the fact that mathematical, astronomical, and physical reasonings may, when complex, be carried on more successfully by the employment of signs; because in these cases the signs themselves accurately represent the abstractness of the relations. Such sciences deal only with relations, and not with objects; hence greater simplification ensures greater accuracy. But no sooner do we quit this sphere of abstractions, to enter that of concrete things, than the use of symbols becomes a source of weakness. Vigorous and effective minds habitually deal with concrete images. This is notably the case with poets and great literates. Their vision is keener than that of other men. However rapid and remote their flight of thought, it is a succession of images, not of abstractions. The details which give significance, and which by us are seen vaguely as through a vanishing

It is seeing with. The image mist, are by them seen in. The image which to us is a mere suggestion, is to them almost as vivid as the object. And it is because they see vividly that they can paint effectively.

Most readers will recognise this to be true of poets, but will doubt its application to philosophers, because imperfect psychology and unscientific criticism have disguised the identity of intellectual processes until it has become a paradox to say that imagination is not less indispensable to the philosopher than to the poet. The paradox falls directly we restate the proposition thus: both poet and philosopher draw their power from the energy of their mental vision—an energy which disengages the mind from the somnolence of habit and from the pressure of obtrusive sensations. In general, men are passive under Sense and the routine of habitual inferences. They are unable to free themselves from the importunities of the apparent facts and apparent relations which solicit their attention; and when they make room for unapparent facts, it is only for those which are familiar to their minds. Hence they can see little more than what they have been taught to see; they can only think what they have been taught to think. For independent vision, and original conception, we must go to children and men of genius. The spontaneity of the one is the power of the other. Ordinary men live among marvels and feel no wonder, grow familiar with objects and learn nothing new about them. Then comes an independent mind which *sees*; and it surprises us to find how servile we have been to habit



and opinion, pages, when called that we also might have seen, had we used our eyes. The link, so long hidden, has now been made visible to us. We hasten to make it visible to others. But the flash of light which revealed that obscured object does not help us to discover others. Darkness still conceals much that we do not even suspect. We continue our routine. We always think our views correct and complete; if we thought otherwise they would cease to be our views; and when the man of keener insight discloses our error, and reveals relations hitherto unsuspected, we learn to see with his eyes, and exclaim: "Now surely we have got the truth."

### 3. *Vision the Criterion of Genius.*

A child is playing with a piece of paper and brings it near the flame of a candle; another child looks on. Both are completely absorbed by the objects, both are ignorant or oblivious of the relation between the combustible object and the flame: a relation which becomes apparent only when the paper is alight. What is called the thoughtlessness of childhood prevents their seeing this unapparent fact; it is a fact which has not been sufficiently impressed upon their experience so as to form an indissoluble element in their conception of the two in juxtaposition. Whereas in the mind of the nurse this relation is so vividly impressed that no sooner does the paper approach the flame than the unapparent fact becomes almost as visible as the objects, and a warning is

given. She sees what the children do not, or cannot see. It has become part of her organised experience.

The superiority of one mind over another depends on the rapidity with which experiences are thus organised. The superiority may be general or special: it may manifest itself in a power of assimilating very various experiences, so as to have manifold relations familiar to it, or in a power of assimilating very special relations, so as to constitute a distinctive aptitude for one branch of art or science. The experience which is thus organised must of course have been originally a direct object of consciousness, either as an impressive fact or impressive inference. Unless the paper had been seen to burn, no one could know that contact with flame would consume it. By a vivid remembrance the experience of the past is made available to the present, so that we do not need actually to burn paper once more—we see the relation mentally. In like manner, Newton did not need to go through the demonstrations of many complex problems, they flashed upon him as he read the propositions; they were seen by him in that rapid glance, as they would have been made visible through the slower process of demonstration. A good chemist does not need to test many a proposition by bringing actual gases or acids into operation, and seeing the result; he *foresees* the result: his mental vision of the objects and their properties is so keen, his experience is so organised, that the result which would be visible in an experi-

ment, is visible to him in an intuition. A fine poet has no need of the actual presence of men and women under the fluctuating impatience of emotion, or under the steadfast hopelessness of grief; he needs no setting sun before his window, under it no sullen sea. These are all visible, and their fluctuations are visible. He sees the quivering lip, the agitated soul; he hears the aching cry, and the dreary wash of waves upon the beach.

The writer who pretends to instruct us should first assure himself that he has clearer vision of the things he speaks of—knows them and their qualities, if not better than we, at least with some distinctive knowledge. Otherwise he should announce himself as a mere echo, a middleman, a distributor. Our need is for more light. This can be given only by an independent seer who

“Lends a precious seeing to the eye.”<sup>1</sup>

All great authors are seers. “Perhaps if we should meet Shakespeare,” says Emerson, “we should not be conscious of any steep inferiority; no: but of great equality;—only that he possessed a strange skill of using, of classifying, his facts, which we lacked. For, notwithstanding our utter incapacity to produce anything like *Hamlet* or *Othello*, we see the perfect reception this wit and immense knowledge of life and liquid eloquence find in us all.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “It adds a precious seeing to the eye.”—*Love's Labour's Lost*, IV. iii.

<sup>2</sup> Essay on “Intellect.”

This aggrandisement of our common stature rests on questionable ground. If our capacity of being moved by Shakespeare discloses a community, our incapacity of producing *Hamlet* no less discloses our inferiority. It is certain that could we meet Shakespeare we should find him strikingly like ourselves—with the same faculties, the same sensibilities, though not in the same degree. The secret of his power over us lies, of course, in our having the capacity to appreciate him. Yet we seeing him in the unimpassioned moods of daily life, it is more than probable that we should see nothing in him but what was ordinary; nay, in some qualities he would seem inferior. Heroes require a perspective. They are men who look superhuman only when elevated on the pedestals of their achievements. In ordinary life they look like ordinary men; not that they are of the common mould, but seem so because their uncommon qualities are not then called forth. Superiority requires an occasion. The common man is helpless in an emergency: assailed by contradictory suggestions, or confused by his incapacity, he cannot see his way. The hour of emergency finds a hero calm and strong, and strong because calm and clear-sighted; he sees what can be done, and does it. This is often a thing of great simplicity, so that we marvel others did not see it. Now it has been done, and proved successful, many underrate its value, thinking that they also would have done precisely the same thing. The world is more just. It refuses to men unassailed by the difficulties of a situation

the glory they have not earned. The world knows how easy most things appear when they have once been done. We can all make the egg stand on end after Columbus.

Shakespeare, then, would probably not impress us with a sense of our inferiority if we were to meet him to-morrow. Most likely we should be bitterly disappointed; because, having formed our conception of him as the man who wrote *Hamlet* and *Othello*, we forget that these were not the products of his ordinary moods, but the manifestations of his power at white heat. In ordinary moods he must be very much as ordinary men, and it is in these we meet him. How notorious is the astonishment of friends and associates when any man's achievements suddenly emerge into renown. "They could never have believed it." Why should they? Knowing him only as one of their circle, and not being gifted with the penetration which discerns a latent energy, but only with the vision which discerns apparent results, they are taken by surprise.<sup>1</sup> Nay, so biassed are we by superficial judgments that we frequently ignore the palpable fact of achieved excellence simply because we cannot reconcile it with our judgment of the man who achieved it. The deed has been done, the work written, the picture painted; it is before the world, and the world is ringing with applause. There is

<sup>1</sup> "No man, it is said, is a hero to his valet. But this is merely because it takes a hero to recognise a hero. The valet will probably be quite able to appreciate his equals."—*Criticisms, Reflections, Maxims of Goethe*, translated by W. B. Rönnefeldt (Scott Library), p. 198.

no doubt whatever that the man whose name is in every mouth did the work; but because our personal impressions of him do not correspond with our conceptions of a powerful man, we abate or withdraw our admiration, and attribute his success to lucky accident. This blear-eyed, taciturn, timid man, whose knowledge of many things is manifestly imperfect, whose inaptitude for many things is apparent, can *he* be the creator of such glorious works? Can *he* be the large and patient thinker, the delicate humorist, the impassioned poet? Nature seems to have answered this question for us; yet so little are we inclined to accept Nature's emphatic testimony on this point that few of us ever see without disappointment the man whose works have revealed his greatness.<sup>1</sup>

It stands to reason that we should not rightly appreciate Shakespeare if we were to meet him, simply because we should meet him as an ordinary man and not as the author of *Hamlet*. Yet if we had a keen insight we should detect even in his quiet talk the marks of an original mind. We could not of course divine, without evidence, how deep and clear his insight, how mighty his power over grand representative symbols, how prodigal his genius: these only could appear on adequate occasions. But we should notice that he had an independent way of looking at things. He would constantly bring

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bulwer-Lytton's entertaining essay "On the Difference between Authors and the Impression conveyed of them by their Works," *Miscellaneous Prose Works*, vol. ii.

before us some latent fact, some unsuspected relation, some resemblance between dissimilar things. We should feel that his utterances were not echoes. If therefore, in these moments of equable serenity, his mind glancing over trivial things saw them with great clearness, we might infer that in moments of intense activity his mind gazing steadfastly on important things would see wonderful visions, where to us all was vague and shifting. During our quiet walk with him across the fields he said little, or little that was memorable; but his eye was taking in the varying forms and relations of objects, and slowly feeding his mind with images. The common hedge-row, the gurgling brook, the waving corn, the shifting cloud-architecture, and the sloping uplands, have been seen by us a thousand times, but they show us nothing new; they have been seen by him a thousand times, and each time with fresh interest and fresh discovery. If he describes that walk he will surprise us with revelations: we can then and thereafter see all that he points out; but we needed his vision to direct our own. And it is one of the incalculable influences of poetry that each new revelation is an education of the eye and the feelings. We learn to see and feel Nature in a far clearer and profounder way now that we have been taught to look by poets. The incurious, unimpassioned gaze of the Alpine peasant on the scenes which mysteriously and profoundly affect the cultivated tourist, is the gaze of one who has never been taught to look. The greater sensibility of educated Europeans to

influences which left even the poetic Greeks unmoved is due to the directing vision of successive poets.<sup>1</sup>

The great difficulty which besets us all—Shakespeares and others, but Shakespeares less than others—is the difficulty of disengaging the mind from the thralldom of sensation and habit, and escaping from the pressure of objects immediately present, or of ideas which naturally emerge, linked together as they are by old associations. We have to see anew, to think anew. It requires great vigour to escape from the old and spontaneously recurrent trains of thought. And as this vigour is native, not acquired, my readers may, perhaps, urge the futility of expounding with so much pains a principle of success in Literature which, however indispensable, must be useless as a guide; they may object that although good Literature rests on insight, there is nothing to be gained by saying “unless a man have the requisite insight he will not succeed.” But there is something to be gained. In the first place, this is an analytical inquiry into the conditions of success: it aims at discriminating the leading principles which inevi-

<sup>1</sup> The influence of poets and other artists in creating a sense for the appreciation of natural beauty can hardly be over-estimated. “The appreciation of natural beauty by the public mind is in fact conditioned by and historically sequent upon the revelations made by great painters and poets; though no doubt the tendencies of these men are themselves controlled by deep-seated influences in the state of culture and society.” —B. Bosanquet, *The Part played by Æsthetic in the Development of Modern Philosophy*. Cf. *The Feeling for Nature in Scottish Poetry*, by John Veitch, 1887.



tably determine success. In the second place, supposing our analysis of the conditions to be correct, practical guidance must follow. We cannot, it is true, gain clearness of vision simply by recognising its necessity; but by recognising its necessity we are taught to seek for it as a primary condition of success; we are forced to come to an understanding with ourselves as to whether we have or have not a distinct vision of the thing we speak of, whether we are seers or reporters, whether the ideas and feelings have been thought and felt by us as part and parcel of our own individual experience, or have been echoed by us from the books and conversation of others? We can always ask, are we painting farm-houses or fairies because these are genuine visions of our own, or only because farm-houses and fairies have been successfully painted by others, and are poetic material?

The man who first saw an acid redden a vegetable-blue had something to communicate; and the man who first saw (mentally) that all acids redden vegetable-blues had something to communicate. But no man can do this again. In the course of his teaching he may have frequently to report the fact; but this repetition is not of much value unless it can be made to disclose some new relation. And so of other and more complex cases. Every sincere man can determine for himself whether he has any authentic tidings to communicate; and although no man can hope to discover much that is actually new, he ought to assure himself that even what is old in

his work has been authenticated by his own experience. He should not even speak of acids reddening vegetable-blues upon mere hearsay, unless he is speaking figuratively. All his facts should have been verified by himself, all his ideas should have been thought by himself. In proportion to the fulfilment of this condition will be his success; in proportion to its non-fulfilment, his failure.

Literature in its vast extent includes writers of three different classes, and in speaking of success we must always be understood to mean the acceptance each writer gains in his own class; otherwise a flashy novelist might seem more successful than a profound poet; a clever compiler more successful than an original discoverer.

The Primary Class is composed of the born seers—men who see for themselves and who originate. These are poets, philosophers, discoverers. The Secondary Class is composed of men less puissant in faculty, but genuine also in their way, who travel along the paths opened by the great originators, and also point 'out' many a side-path and shorter cut. They reproduce and vary the materials furnished by others, but they do this, not as echoes only, they authenticate their tidings, they take care to see what the discoverers have taught them to see, and in consequence of this clear vision they are enabled to arrange and modify the materials so as to produce new results. The Primary Class is composed of men of genius, the Secondary Class of men of talent. It not unfrequently happens, especially in philosophy

and science, that the man of talent may confer a lustre on the original invention; he takes it up a nugget and lays it down a coin. Finally, there is the largest class of all, comprising the Imitators in Art, and the Compilers in Philosophy. These bring nothing to the general stock. They are sometimes (not often) useful; but it is as corn-factors, not as corn-growers. They sometimes do good service by distributing knowledge where otherwise it might never penetrate; but in general their work is more hurtful than beneficial: hurtful, because it is essentially bad work, being insincere work, and because it stands in the way of better work.

Even among Imitators and Compilers there are almost infinite degrees of merit and demerit: echoes of echoes reverberating echoes in endless succession; compilations of all degrees of worth and worthlessness. But, as will be shown hereafter, even in this lower sphere the worth of the work is strictly proportional to the Vision, Sincerity, and Beauty; so that an imitator whose eye is keen for the forms he imitates, whose speech is honest, and whose talent has grace, will by these very virtues rise almost to the Secondary Class, and will secure an honourable success.

I have as yet said but little, and that incidentally, of the part played by the Principle of Vision in Art. Many readers who will admit the principle in Science and Philosophy, may hesitate in extending it to Art, which, as they conceive, draws its inspirations from the Imagination. Properly under-

stood there is no discrepancy between the two opinions; and in the next chapter I shall endeavour to show how Imagination is only another form of this very Principle of Vision which we have been considering.

## CHAPTER III.

### OF VISION IN ART.

#### 1. *Imagination.*

THERE are many who will admit, without hesitation, that in Philosophy what I have called the Principle of Vision holds an important rank, because the mind must necessarily err in its speculations unless it clearly sees facts and relations; but there are some who will hesitate before admitting the principle to a similar rank in Art, because, as they conceive, Art is independent of the truth of facts, and is swayed by the autocratic power of Imagination.

It is on this power that our attention should first be arrested; the more so because it is usually spoken of in vague rhapsodical language, with intimations of its being something peculiarly mysterious. There are few words more abused. The artist is called a creator, which in one sense he is; and his creations are said to be produced by processes wholly unallied to the creations of Philosophy, which they are not. Hence it is a paradox to speak of the *Principia* as a creation demanding severe and continuous exercise of the imagination; but it is only a paradox to those

who have never analysed the processes of artistic and philosophic creation.

I am far from desiring to innovate in language, or to raise interminable discussions respecting the terms in general use. Nevertheless we have here to deal with questions that lie deeper than mere names. We have to examine processes, and trace, if possible, the methods of intellectual activity pursued in all branches of Literature; and we must not suffer our course to be obstructed by any confusion in terms that can be cleared up. We may respect the demarcations established by usage, but we must ascertain, if possible, the fundamental affinities. There is, for instance, a broad distinction between Science and Art, which, so far from requiring to be effaced, requires to be emphasised: it is that in Science the paramount appeal is to the Intellect—its purpose being instruction; in Art, the paramount appeal is to the Emotions—its purpose being pleasure. A work of Art must of course indirectly appeal to the Intellect, and a work of Science will also indirectly appeal to the Feelings; nevertheless a poem on the stars and a treatise on astronomy have distinct aims and distinct methods. But having recognised the broadly-marked differences, we are called upon to ascertain the underlying resemblances. Logic and Imagination belong equally to both. It is only because men have been attracted by the differences that they have overlooked the not less important affinities. Imagination is an intellectual process common to Philosophy and Art; but in each it is allied with different processes, and directed to differ-

ent ends;<sup>1</sup> and hence, although the *Principia* demanded an imagination of not less vivid and sustained power than was demanded by *Othello*, it would be very false psychology to infer that the mind of Newton was competent to the creation of *Othello*, or the mind of Shakespeare capable of producing the *Principia*. They were specifically different minds; their works were specifically different. But in both the imagination was intensely active. Newton had a mind predominantly ratiocinative: its movement was spontaneously towards the abstract relations of things. Shakespeare had a mind predominantly emotive, the intellect always moving in alliance with the feelings, and spontaneously fastening upon the concrete facts in preference to their abstract relations. Their mental Vision was turned towards images of different orders, and it moved in alliance with different faculties; but this Vision was the cardinal quality of both. Dr. Johnson was guilty of a surprising fallacy in saying that a great mathematician might also be a great poet: "Sir, a man can walk east as far as he can walk west."<sup>2</sup> True, but mathematics and poetry do

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lewes's *Problems of Life and Mind*, 1st Series, Prob. I., Chap. V.; Tyndall's "Scientific Use of Imagination" (in *Fragments of Science*); Goschen, *The Cultivation of the Imagination*; and Bulwer-Lytton, "The Normal Clairvoyance of the Imagination," *Miscell. Prose Works*, vol. iii. pp. 27-38.

<sup>2</sup> "Robertson said, one man had more judgment, another more imagination. Johnson: 'No, sir; it is only, one man has more mind than another. He may direct it differently; he may, by accident, see the success of one kind of study, and take a desire to excel in it. I am persuaded that, had Sir Isaac Newton applied to poetry, he would have made a very fine epic poem. . . . Sir, the man who has vigour may

not differ as east and west; and he would hardly assert that a man who could walk twenty miles could therefore swim that distance.

The real state of the case is somewhat obscured by our observing that many men of science, and some even eminent as teachers and reporters, display but slender claims to any unusual vigour of imagination. It must be owned that they are often slightly dull; and in matters of Art are not unfrequently blockheads. Nay, they would themselves repel it as a slight if the epithet "imaginative" were applied to them; it would seem to impugn their gravity, to cast doubts upon their accuracy. But such men are the cisterns, not the fountains, of Science. They rely upon the knowledge already organised; they do not bring accessions to the common stock. They are not investigators, but imitators; they are not discoverers—inventors. No man ever made a discovery (he may have stumbled on one) without the exercise of as much imagination as, employed in another direction and in alliance with other faculties, would have gone to the creation of a poem. Every one who has seriously investigated a novel question, who has really interrogated Nature with a view to a distinct answer, will bear me out in saying that it requires intense and sustained effort of imagination. The relations of sequence among the phenomena must be seen; they are hidden; they can only be seen mentally; a thousand suggestions rise

walk to the east, just as well as to the west, if he happens to turn his head that way."—*Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, August 15, Carruthers' edition, p. 16.



before the mind, but they are recognised as old suggestions, or as inadequate to reveal what is sought; the experiments by which the problem may be solved have to be imagined; and to imagine a good experiment is as difficult as to invent a good fable, for we must have distinctly *present*—in clear mental vision—the known qualities and relations of all the objects, and must *see* what will be the effect of introducing some new qualifying agent. If any one thinks this is easy, let him try it: the trial will teach him a lesson respecting the methods of intellectual activity not without its use. Easy enough, indeed, is the ordinary practice of experiment, which is either a mere repetition or variation of experiments already devised (as ordinary story-tellers re-tell the stories of others), or else a haphazard, blundering way of bringing phenomena together, to see what will happen. To invent is another process. The discoverer and the poet are inventors; and they are so because their mental vision detects the unapparent, unsuspected facts, almost as vividly as ocular vision rests on the apparent and familiar.

It is the special aim of Philosophy to discover and systematise the abstract *relations* of things; and for this purpose it is forced to allow the things themselves to drop out of sight, fixing attention solely on the quality immediately investigated, to the neglect of all other qualities. Thus the philosopher,<sup>1</sup> having to appreciate the mass, density, refracting power, or

<sup>1</sup> That is, the natural philosopher, or scientist. Cf. *Lewes's History of Philosophy*, Introduction.

chemical constitution of some object, finds he can best appreciate this by isolating it from every other detail. He abstracts this one quality from the complex bundle of qualities which constitute the object, and he makes this one stand for the whole. This is a necessary simplification. If all the qualities were equally present to his mind, his vision would be perplexed by their multiple suggestions. He may follow out the relations of each in turn, but he cannot follow them out together.

The aim of the poet is very different. He wishes to kindle the emotions by the suggestion of objects themselves; and for this purpose he must present images of the objects rather than of any single quality. It is true that he also must exercise a power of abstraction and selection. He cannot without confusion present all the details. And it is here that the fine selective instinct of the true artist shows itself, in knowing what details to present and what to omit. Observe this: the abstraction of the philosopher is meant to keep the object itself, with its perturbing suggestions, out of sight, allowing only one quality to fill the field of vision; whereas the abstraction of the poet is meant to bring the object itself into more vivid relief, to make it visible by means of the selected qualities. In other words, the one aims at abstract symbols, the other at picturesque effects. The one can carry on his deductions by the aid of colourless signs, *x* or *y*. The other appeals to the emotions through the symbols which will most vividly express the real objects in their relations to our sensibilities.

Imagination is obviously active in both. From known facts the philosopher infers the facts that are unapparent. He does so by an effort of imagination (hypothesis) which has to be subjected to verification: he makes a mental picture of the unapparent fact, and then sets about to prove that his picture does in some way correspond with the reality. The correctness of his hypothesis and verification must depend on the clearness of his vision. Were all the qualities of things apparent to Sense, there would be no longer any mystery. A glance would be Science. But only some of the facts are visible; and it is because we see little, that we have to imagine much. We see a feather rising in the air, and a quill, from the same bird, sinking to the ground: these contradictory reports of sense lead the mind astray; or perhaps excite a desire to know the reason. We cannot see—we must imagine—the unapparent facts. Many mental pictures may be formed, but to form the one which corresponds with the reality requires great sagacity and a very clear vision of known facts. In trying to form this mental picture, we remember that when the air is removed the feather falls as rapidly as the quill, and thus we *see* that the air is the cause of the feather's rising; we mentally see the air pushing under the feather, and see it almost as plainly as if the air were a visible mass thrusting the feather upwards.

From a mistaken appreciation of the real process, this would by few be called an effort of Imagination. On the contrary, some "wild hypothesis" would be

lauded as imaginative in proportion as it departed from all suggestion of experience—*i.e.*, real mental vision. To have imagined that the feather rose owing to its "specific lightness," and that the quill fell owing to its "heaviness," would to many appear a more decided effort of the imaginative faculty. Whereas it is no effort of that faculty at all; it is simply naming differently the facts it pretends to explain. To imagine—to form an image—we must have the numerous relations of things present to the mind, and see the objects in their actual order. In this we are of course greatly aided by the mass of organised experience, which allows us rapidly to estimate the relations of gravity or affinity just as we remember that fire burns and that heated bodies expand. But be the aid great or small, and the result victorious or disastrous, the imaginative process is always the same.

There is a slighter strain on the imagination of the poet, because of his greater freedom. He is not, like the philosopher, limited to the things which are, or were. His vision includes things which might be, and things which never were. The philosopher is not entitled to assume that Nature sympathises with man; he must prove the fact to be so if he intend making any use of it;—we admit no deductions from unproved assumptions. But the poet is at perfect liberty to assume this; and having done so, he paints what would be the manifestations of this sympathy. The naturalist who should describe a hippogriff would incur the laughing scorn of Europe: but the poet

feigns its existence, and all Europe is delighted when it rises with Astolfo in the air. We never pause to ask the poet whether such an animal exists. He has seen it, and we see it with his eyes. Talking trees do not startle us in Virgil and Tennyson. Puck and Titania, Hamlet and Falstaff, are as true for us as Luther and Napoleon, so long as we are in the realm of Art. We grant the poet a free privilege because he will use it only for our pleasure. In Science pleasure is not an object, and we give no licence.

Philosophy and Art both render the invisible visible by imagination. Where Sense observes two isolated objects, Imagination discloses two related objects. This relation is the nexus visible. We had not seen it before; it is apparent now. Where we should only see a calamity the poet makes us see a tragedy. Where we could only see a sunrise he enables us to see

“Day like a mighty river flowing in.”

Imagination is not the exclusive appanage of artists, but belongs in varying degrees to all men. It is simply the power of forming images. Supplying the energy of Sense where Sense cannot reach, it brings into distinctness the facts, obscure or occult, which are grouped round an object or an idea, but which are not actually present to Sense. Thus, at the aspect of a windmill, the mind forms images of many characteristic facts relating to it; and the kind of images will depend very much on the general disposition, or particular mood, of the mind affected by the object: the painter, the poet, and the moralist

will have different images suggested by the presence of the windmill or its symbol. There are indeed sluggish minds so incapable of self-evolved activity, and so dependent on the immediate suggestions of Sense, as to be almost destitute of the power of forming distinct images beyond the immediate circle of sensuous associations; and these are rightly named unimaginative minds; but in all minds of energetic activity, groups and clusters of images, many of them representing remote relations, spontaneously present themselves in conjunction with objects or their symbols. It should, however, be borne in mind that Imagination can only recall what Sense has previously impressed. No man imagines any detail of which he has not previously had direct or indirect experience. Objects as fictitious as mermaids and hippogriffs are made up from the gatherings of Sense.

"Made up from the gatherings of Sense" is a phrase which may seem to imply some peculiar plastic power such as is claimed exclusively for artists: a power not of simple recollection, but of recollection and recombination. Yet this power belongs also to philosophers. To combine the half of a woman with the half of a fish—to imagine the union as an existing organism—is not really a different process from that of combining the experience of a chemical action with an electric action, and seeing that the two are one existing fact. When the poet hears the storm-cloud muttering, and sees the moonlight sleeping on the bank, he transfers

his experience of human phenomena to the cloud and the moonlight: he personifies, draws Nature within the circle of emotion, and is called a poet. When the philosopher sees electricity in the storm-cloud, and sees the sunlight stimulating vegetable growth, he transfers his experience of physical phenomena to these objects, and draws within the circle of Law phenomena which hitherto have been unclassified. Obviously the imagination has been as active in the one case as in the other; the *differentia* lying in the purposes of the two, and in the general constitution of the two minds.

It has been noted that there is less strain on the imagination of the poet; but even his greater freedom is not altogether disengaged from the necessity of verification; his images must have at least subjective truth; if they do not accurately correspond with objective realities, they must correspond with our sense of congruity. No poet is allowed the licence of creating images inconsistent with our conceptions. If he said the moonlight *burnt* the bank, we should reject the image as untrue, inconsistent with our conceptions of moonlight; whereas the gentle repose of the moonlight on the bank readily associates itself with images of sleep.

The often mooted question, What is Imagination? thus receives a very clear and definite answer. It is the power of forming images; it reinstates, in a visible group, those objects which are invisible, either from absence or from imperfection of our senses. That is its generic character. Its specific character,

which marks it off from Memory, and which is derived from the powers of selection and recombination, will be expounded further on. Here I only touch upon its chief characteristic, in order to disengage the term from that mysteriousness which writers have usually assigned to it, thereby rendering philosophic criticism impossible. Thus disengaged it may be used with more certainty in an attempt to estimate the imaginative power of various works.

Hitherto the amount of that power has been too frequently estimated according to the extent of *departure* from ordinary experience in the images selected. Nineteen out of twenty would unhesitatingly declare that a hippogriff was a greater effort of imagination than a well-conceived human character; a Peri than a woman; Puck or Titania than Falstaff or Imogen. A description of Paradise extremely unlike any known garden must, it is thought, necessarily be more imaginative than the description of a quiet rural nook. It may be more imaginative; it may be less so. All depends upon the mind of the poet. To suppose that it must, because of its departure from ordinary experience, is a serious error. The muscular effort required to draw a cheque for a thousand pounds might as reasonably be thought greater than that required for a cheque of five pounds; and much as the one cheque seems to surpass the other in value, the result of presenting both to the bankers may show that the more modest cheque is worth its full five pounds, whereas the other is only



so much waste paper. The description of Paradise may be a glittering sarrago; the description of the landscape may be full of sweet rural images: the one having a glare of gaslight and Vauxhall splendour; the other having the scent of new-mown hay.

A work is imaginative in virtue of the power of its images over our emotions; not in virtue of any rarity or surprisingness in the images themselves. A Madonna and Child by Fra Angelico is more powerful over our emotions than a Crucifixion by a vulgar artist; a beggar-boy by Murillo is more imaginative than an Assumption by the same painter; but the Assumption by Titian displays far greater imagination than either. We must guard against the natural tendency to attribute to the artist what is entirely due to accidental conditions. A tropical scene, luxuriant with tangled overgrowth and impressive in the grandeur of its phenomena, may more decisively arrest our attention than an English landscape with its green cornlands and plenteous homesteads. But this superiority of interest is no proof of the artist's superior imagination; and by a spectator familiar with the tropics, greater interest may be felt in the English landscape, because its images may more forcibly arrest his attention by their novelty. And were this not so, were the inalienable impressiveness of tropical scenery always to give the poet who described it a superiority in effect, this would not prove the superiority of his imagination. For either he has been familiar with such scenes, and imagines them just as the other poet imagines his English

landscape—by an effort of mental vision, calling up the absent objects; or he has merely read the descriptions of others, and from these makes up his picture. It is the same with his rival, who also recalls and recombines. Foolish critics often betray their ignorance by saying that a painter or a writer “only copies what he has seen, or puts down what he has known.” They forget that no man imagines what he has not seen or known, and that it is in the *selection of the characteristic details*<sup>1</sup> that the artistic power is manifested. Those who suppose that familiarity with scenes or characters enables a painter or a novelist to “copy” them with artistic effect, forget the well-known fact that the vast majority of men are painfully incompetent to avail themselves of this familiarity, and cannot form vivid pictures even to themselves of scenes in which they pass their daily lives; and if they could imagine these, they would need the delicate selective instinct to guide them in the admission and omission of details, as well as in the grouping of the images. Let any one try to “copy” the wife or brother he knows so well—to make a human image which shall speak and act so as to impress strangers with a belief in its truth—and he will then see that the much-despised reliance on actual experience is not the mechanical procedure it is believed to be. When Scott drew Saladin and Cœur de Lion he did not really display more imaginative power than when he drew the Mucklebackits,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Taine, *Philosophie de l'Art*, I., Sect. V.; Poynter, *Ten Lectures on Art*, p. 195.

although the majority of readers would suppose that the one demanded a great effort of imagination, whereas the other formed part of his familiar experiences of Scottish life. The mistake here lies in confounding the sources from which the materials were derived with the plastic power of forming these materials into images. More conscious effort may have been devoted to the collection of the materials in the one case than in the other, but that this has nothing to do with the imaginative power employed may readily be proved by an analysis of the intellectual processes of composition. Scott had often been in fishermen's cottages and heard them talk; from the registered experience of a thousand details relating to the life of the poor, their feelings and their thoughts, he gained that material upon which his imagination could work; in the case of Saladin and Cœur de Lion he had to gain these, principally through books and his general experience of life; and the images he formed—the vision he had of Mucklebackit and Saladin—must be set down to his artistic faculty, not to his experience or erudition.

It has been well said by a very imaginative writer,<sup>1</sup> that “when a poet floats in the ‘empyrean, and only takes a bird’s-eye view of the earth, some people accept the mere fact of his soaring for sublimity, and mistake his dim vision of earth for proximity to heaven.” And in like manner, when a thinker frees

<sup>1</sup> George Eliot, *Essays and Leaves from a Note-book*, “Worldliness and Other-Worldliness: The Poet Young.”

himself from all the trammels of fact, and propounds a "bold hypothesis," people mistake the vagabond erratic flights of guessing for a higher range of philosophic power. In truth, the imagination is most tasked when it has to paint pictures which shall withstand the silent criticism of general experience, and to frame hypotheses which shall withstand the confrontation with facts. I cannot here enter into the interesting question of Realism and Idealism in Art, which must be debated in a future chapter; but I wish to call special attention to the psychological fact that fairies and demons, remote as they are from experience, are not created by a more vigorous effort of imagination than milkmaids and poachers. The intensity of vision in the artist and of vividness in his creations are the sole tests of his imaginative power.

## 2. *Distinct Images Necessary.*

If this brief exposition has carried the reader's assent he will readily apply the principle, and recognise that an artist produces an effect in virtue of the distinctness with which he sees the objects he represents, seeing them not vaguely as in vanishing apparitions, but steadily, and in their most characteristic relations. To this Vision he adds artistic skill with which to make us see. He may have clear conceptions, yet fail to make them clear to us: in this case he has imagination, but is not an artist. Without clear Vision no skill can avail. Imperfect

Vision necessitates imperfect representation; words take the place of ideas.

In Young's *Night Thoughts* there are many examples of the pseudo-imaginative, betraying an utter want of steady Vision. Here is one—

"His hand the good man fastens on the skies,  
And bids earth roll, nor feels her idle whirl."

"Pause for a moment," remarks a critic,<sup>1</sup> "to realise the image, and the monstrous absurdity of a man's grasping the skies and hanging habitually suspended there, while he contemptuously bids the earth roll, warns you that no genuine feeling could have suggested so unnatural a conception."<sup>2</sup> It is obvious that if Young had imagined the position he assigned to the good man he would have seen its absurdity; instead of imagining, he allowed the vague, transient suggestion of half-nascent images to shape themselves in verse.

Now compare with this a passage in which imagination is really active. Wordsworth recalls how—

<sup>1</sup> George Eliot, in the article just noted. The lines, which are from "Night" IV., are misquoted both in the *Westminster Review* (where the article originally appeared) and in the *Fortnightly*.

<sup>2</sup> One further passage from the same article is worth quoting: "No writer whose rhetoric was checked by the slightest truthful intentions could have said—

'An eye of awe and wonder let me roll,  
And roll for ever.'

Abstracting the mere poetical associations with the eye, this is hardly less absurd than if he had wished to stand for ever with his mouth open."

In November days,  
 When vapours rolling down the valleys made  
 A lonely scene more lonesome; among woods  
 At noon; and mid the calm of summer nights,  
*When, by the margin of the trembling lake,*  
 Beneath the gloomy hills, homeward I went  
 In solitude, such intercourse was mine."

There is nothing very grand or impressive in this passage, and therefore it is a better illustration for my purpose. Note how happily the one image, out of a thousand possible images by which November might be characterised, is chosen to call up in us the feeling of the lonely scene; and with what delicate selection the calm of summer nights, the "trembling lake" (an image in an epithet), and the gloomy hills, are brought before us. His boyhood might have furnished him with a hundred different pictures, each as distinct as this; the power is shown in selecting this one—painting it so vividly. He continues:—

"Mine was it in the fields both day and night  
 And by the water, all the summer long.  
 And in the frosty season, when the sun  
 Was set, and, visible for many a mile,  
 The cottage windows through the twilight blazed,  
 I heeded not the summons: happy time  
 It was indeed for all of us; for me  
 It was a time of rapture! Clear and loud  
 The village clock tolled six—I wheeled about,  
 Proud and exulting like an untired horse  
 That cares not for his home. All shod with steel  
 We hissed along the polished ice, in games  
 Confederate, imitative of the chase  
 And woodland pleasures—the resounding horn,  
 And hark."

There is nothing very felicitous in these lines; yet even here the poet, if languid, is never false. As he proceeds the vision brightens, and the verse becomes instinct with life:—

Through the darkness and the cold we flew,  
And not a voice was idle: with the din  
Smitten, the precipices rang aloud;  
*The leafless trees and every icy crag,*  
*Tinkled like iron; while far-distant hills*  
*Into the tumult sent an alien sound*  
*Of melancholy; not unnoticed while the stars,*  
*Eastward, were sparkling clear; and in the west*  
*The orange sky of evening died away.*

"Not seldom from the uproar I retired  
Into a silent bay, or sportively  
Glanced sideways, leaving the tumultuous throng,  
*To cut across the reflex of a star;*  
*Image, that, flying still before me, gleamed*  
Upon the glassy plain: and oftentimes,  
When we had given our bodies to the wind,  
*And all the shadowy bank on either side*  
*Came sweeping through the darkness, spinning still*  
The rapid line of motion, then at once  
Have I, reclining back upon my heels,  
Stopped short; yet still the solitary cliffs  
Wheeled by me—even as if the earth had rolled  
With visible motion her diurnal round!  
Behind me did they stretch a solemn train  
Feebler and feebler, and I land and water  
Till all was tranquil as a summer sea."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The fragment from which these lines are quoted is dated 1799 by Wordsworth, and first appeared in 1809 in the magazine known as *The Friend*. It was republished several times under the title "Influence of Natural Objects in Calling Forth and Strengthening the Imagination in Boyhood and Early Youth," and was finally incorporated in Book

Every poetical reader will feel delight in the accuracy with which the details are painted, and the marvellous clearness with which the whole scene is imagined, both in its objective and subjective relations—*i.e.*, both in the objects seen and the emotions they suggest.

What the majority of modern verse writers call "imagery" is not the product of imagination, but a restless pursuit of comparison and a lax use of language. Instead of presenting us with an image of the object, they present us with something which they tell us is like the object—which it rarely is. The thing itself has no clear significance to them, it is only a text for the display of their ingenuity. If, however, we turn from poetasters to poets, we see great accuracy in depicting the things themselves or their suggestions, so that we may be certain the things presented themselves in the field of the poet's vision, and were painted because seen. The images arose with sudden vivacity, or were detained long enough to enable their characters to be seized. It is this power of detention to which I would call particular notice, because a valuable practical lesson may be learned through a proper estimate of it. If clear Vision be indispensable to success in Art, all means of securing that clearness should be sought. Now one means is that of detaining an image long

I. of *The Prelude*. Lewes, in the *Fortnightly* text, seems to be quoting, not always accurately, from an edition prior to that of 1845. The lines as given here are corrected to agree with the text of Dowden's edition, vol. i. pp. 197-198.



enough before the mind to allow of its being seen in all its characteristics. The explanation Newton gave of his discovery of the great law points in this direction; it was by always thinking of the subject, by keeping it constantly before his mind, that he finally saw the truth. Artists brood over the chaos of their suggestions, and thus shape them into creations. Try and form a picture in your own mind of your early skating experience. It may be that the scene only comes back upon you in shifting outlines, you recall the general facts, and some few particulars are vivid, but the greater part of the details vanish again before they can assume decisive shape; they are but half nascent, or die as soon as born: a wave of recollection washes over the mind, but it quickly retires, leaving no trace behind. This is the common experience. Or it may be that the whole scene flashes upon you with peculiar vividness, so that you see, almost as in actual presence, all the leading characteristics of the picture.<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth may have seen his early days in a succession of vivid flashes, or he may have attained to his distinctness of vision by a steadfast continuity of effort, in which what at first was vague became slowly definite as he

<sup>1</sup> "They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude."—*The Daffodils*.

These lines are by Mrs. Wordsworth—lines which the poet himself said would, if thoroughly felt, annihilate nine-tenths of the reviews in the kingdom. He further adds: "The subject of these stanzas is rather an elementary feeling and simple impression (approaching to the nature of an ocular spectrum) upon the imaginative faculty than an exertion of it."

gazed. It is certain that only a very imaginative mind could have seen such details as he has gathered together in the lines describing how he

"Cut across the reflex of a star;  
 Image, that, flying still before me, gleamed  
 Upon the glassy plain."

The whole description may have been written with great rapidity, or with anxious and tentative labour; the memories of boyish days may have been kindled with a sudden illumination, or they may have grown slowly into the requisite distinctness, detail after detail emerging from the general obscurity, like the appearing stars at night. But whether the poet felt his way to images and epithets, rapidly or slowly, is unimportant; we have to do only with the result; and the result implies, as an absolute condition, that the images were distinct. Only thus could they serve the purposes of poetry, which must arouse in us memories of similar scenes, and kindle emotions of pleasurable experience.

### 3. *Burke on Indistinct Imagery.*

Having cited an example of bad writing consequent on imperfect Vision, and an example of good writing consequent on accurate Vision, I might consider that enough had been done for the immediate purpose of the present chapter; the many other illustrations which the Principle of Vision would require before it could be considered as adequately expounded, I must defer till I come to treat of the application of principles.

But before closing this chapter it may be needful to examine some arguments which have a contrary tendency, and imply, or seem to imply, that distinctness of Vision is very far from necessary.

At the outset we must come to an understanding as to this word "image," and endeavour to free the word "vision" from all equivocal. If these words were understood literally there would be an obvious absurdity in speaking of an image of a sound, or of seeing an emotion. Yet if by means of symbols the effect of a sound is produced in us, or the psychological state of any human being is rendered intelligible to us, we are said to have images of these things, which the poet has imagined. It is because the eye is the most valued and intellectual of our senses that the majority of metaphors are borrowed from its sensations. Language, after all, is only the use of symbols, and Art also can only affect us through symbols. If a phrase can summon a terror resembling that summoned by the danger which it indicates, a man is said to *see* the danger. Sometimes a phrase will awaken more vivid images of danger than would be called up by the actual presence of the dangerous object; because the mind will more readily apprehend the symbols of the phrase than interpret the indications of unassisted sense.

Burke, in his "Essay on the Sublime and Beautiful,"<sup>1</sup> lays down the proposition that distinctness of imagery is often injurious to the effect of Art. "It is one thing," he says, "to make an idea clear, another to

<sup>1</sup> Part II., Sect. IV.

make it *affecting* to the imagination. If I make a drawing of a palace or a temple or a landscape, I present a very clear idea of those objects; but then (allowing for the effect of imitation, which is something) my picture can at most affect only as the palace, temple, or landscape would have affected in reality. On the other hand, the most lively and spirited verbal description I can give raises a very obscure and imperfect *idea* of such objects;<sup>1</sup> but then it is in my power to raise a stronger *emotion* by the description than I could do by the best painting. This experience constantly evinces. The proper manner of conveying the *affections* of the mind from one to another is by words; there is great insufficiency in all other methods of communication; and so far is a clearness of imagery from being absolutely necessary to an influence upon the passions, that they may be considerably operated upon without presenting any image at all, by certain sounds adapted to that purpose." If by image is meant only what the eye can see, Burke is undoubtedly right. But this is

1 "Fair is her cottage in its place,  
Where yon broad water sweetly slowly glides.  
It sees itself from thatch to base  
Dream in the sliding tides."

"I cannot call up any vision of this scene which gives me any vivid pleasure, nor are any two visions of it that I call up alike. For visualising purposes I should be much assisted by knowing how many windows the cottage had, where the door was, how many trees there were about, and so on. Nevertheless, I would assert with confidence that the stanza has produced in me, and doubtless in many others, greater rushes of delightful emotion than the sight of what is described has ever produced in any human being."—Gurney's *Power of Sound*, p. 449, note.

obviously not our restricted meaning of the word when we speak of poetic imagery; and Burke's error becomes apparent when he proceeds to show that there "are reasons in nature why the obscure idea, when properly conveyed, should be more affecting than the clear." He does not seem to have considered that the idea of an indefinite object can only be properly conveyed by indefinite images; any image of Eternity or Death that pretended to visual distinctness would be false. Having overlooked this, he says: "We do not anywhere meet a more sublime description than this justly celebrated one of Milton, wherein he gives the portrait of Satan with a dignity so suitable to the subject:—

" " He, above the rest  
In shape and gesture proudly eminent,  
Stood like a tower. His form had not yet lost  
All her original brightness, nor appeared  
Less than archangel ruined, and the excess  
Of glory obscured: as when the sun new-risen  
Looks through the horizontal misty air  
Shorn of his beams, or, from behind the moon,  
In dim eclipse, disastrous twilight sheds  
On half the nations, and with fear of change  
Perplexes monarchs."<sup>1</sup>

Here is a very noble picture," adds Burke, "and in what does this poetical picture consist? In images of a tower, an archangel, the sun rising through mists, or in an eclipse, the ruin of monarchs, and the revolutions of kingdoms." Instead of recognising the imagery here as the source of the power, he says, "The mind is hurried out of itself [rather a strange result!] by a

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, Book I., ll. 589-599.

crowd of great and confused images; which affect because they are crowded and confused. For, separate them, and you lose much of the greatness; and join them, and you infallibly lose the clearness." This is altogether a mistake. The images are vivid enough to make us feel the hovering presence of an awe-inspiring figure having the height and firmness of a tower, and the dusky splendour of a ruined archangel. The poet indicates only that amount of concreteness which is necessary for the clearness of the picture,—only the height and firmness of the tower and the brightness of the sun in eclipse. More concreteness would disturb the clearness by calling attention to irrelevant details. To suppose that these images produce the effect because they are crowded and confused (they are crowded and not confused) is to imply that any other images would do equally well, if they were equally crowded. "Separate them, and you lose much of the greatness." Quite true: the image of the tower would want the splendour of the sun. But this much may be said of all descriptions which proceed upon details. And so far from the impressive clearness of the picture vanishing in the crowd of images, it is by these images that the clearness is produced: the details make it impressive, and affect our imagination.

It should be added that Burke came very near a true explanation in the following passage:—"It will be difficult to conceive how words can move the passions which belong to real objects without representing these objects clearly." This is difficult to us because

we do not sufficiently distinguish, in our observations upon language, between a clear expression and a strong expression. . . . The former regards the understanding; the latter belongs to the passions. The one describes a thing as it is, the other describes it as it is felt. Now as there is a moving tone of voice, an impassioned countenance, an agitated gesture, which affect independently of the things about which they are exerted, so there are words and certain dispositions of words which being peculiarly devoted to passionate subjects, and always used by those who are under the influence of any passion, touch and move us more than those which far more clearly and distinctly express the subject-matter."<sup>1</sup> Burke here fails to see that the tones, looks, and gestures are the intelligible symbols of passion—the "images" in the true sense—just as words are the intelligible symbols of ideas. The subject-matter is as clearly expressed by the one as by the other; for if the description of a Lion be conveyed in the symbols of admiration or of terror, the subject-matter is *then* a Lion passionately and not zoologically considered.<sup>2</sup> And this Burke himself was led to admit, for he adds: "We yield to sympathy what we refuse to description. The truth is, all verbal description, merely as naked description, though never so exact, conveys so poor and insufficient an idea of the thing described, that it could scarcely have the

<sup>1</sup> Part V., Sect. VII.

<sup>2</sup> See J. S. Mill's *Dissertations and Discussions*, vol. i. p. 63; *Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties*, from which this illustration is taken.

(*invention*), and the result is an image of great vividness, which has perhaps no corresponding reality in the external world.

Minds differ in the vividness with which they recall the elements of previous experience, and mentally see the absent objects; they differ also in the aptitudes for selection, abstraction, and recombination: the fine selective instinct of the artist, which makes him fasten upon the details which will most powerfully affect us, without any disturbance of the harmony of the general impression, does not depend solely upon the vividness of his memory and the clearness with which the objects are seen, but depends also upon very complex and peculiar conditions of sympathy which we call genius. Hence we find one man remembering a multitude of details, with a memory so vivid that it almost amounts at times to hallucination, yet without any artistic power; and we may find men—Blake was one—with an imagination of unusual activity, who are nevertheless incapable, from deficient sympathy, of seizing upon those symbols which will most affect us.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In his criticism of Blake's illustrations to Dante's *Inferno* Mr. Swinburne says:—"Blake has thoroughly understood and given back the physical symbols of this first punishment in Dante; the whirling motion of his figures has, however, more of blind violence and brute speed than the text seems to indicate. They are dashed and dragged, one upon another . . . not moved as we expect to see them, in sad rapidity of stately measure and even time of speed. The flame-like impulse of idea, natural to Blake, cannot absolutely match itself against Dante's divine justice and intense innate forbearance in detail; nor so comprehend, as by dint of reproduction to compete with, that supreme sense of inward and outward right which rules and attunes every word of the *Commedia*."—*William Blake*, p. 75.



Our native susceptibilities and acquired tastes determine which of the many qualities in an object shall most impress us, and be most clearly recalled. One man remembers the combustible properties of a substance, which to another is memorable for its polarising property; to one man a stream is so much water-power, to another a rendezvous for lovers.

In the close of the last paragraph we came face to face with the great difficulty which constantly arrests speculation on these matters—the existence of special aptitudes vaguely characterised as genius. These are obviously incommunicable. No recipe can be given for genius. No man can be taught how to exercise the power of imagination. But he can be taught how to aid it, and how to assure himself whether he is using it or not. Having once laid hold of the Principle of Vision as a fundamental principle of Art, he can always thus far apply it, that he can assure himself whether he does or does not distinctly *see* the cottage he is describing, the rivulet that is gurgling through his verses, or the character he is painting; he can assure himself whether he hears the voice of the speakers, and feels that what they say is true to their natures; he can assure himself whether he sees, as in actual experience, the emotion he is depicting; and he will know that if he does not see these things he must wait until he can, or he will paint them ineffectively. With distinct Vision he will be able to make the best use of his powers of expression; and the most splendid powers of expression will not avail him if his Vision be indistinct. This is true of objects that never were

seen by the eye, that never could be seen. It is as true of what are called the highest flights of imagination as of the lowest flights. The mind must *see* the angel or the demon, the hippogriff or centaur, the pixie or the mermaid.

Ruskin notices<sup>1</sup> how repeatedly Turner—the most imaginative of landscape painters—introduced into his pictures, after a lapse of many years, memories of something which, however small and unimportant, had struck him in his earlier studies. He believes that all Turner's "composition" was an arrangement of remembrances summoned just as they were wanted, and each in its fittest place. His vision was primarily composed of strong memory of the place itself, and secondarily of memories of other places associated in a harmonious, helpful way with the now central thought. He recalled and selected.

I am prepared to hear of many readers, especially young readers, protesting against the doctrine of this chapter as prosaic. They have been so long accustomed to consider imagination as peculiarly distinguished by its disdain of reality, and Invention as only admirable when its products are not simply new by selection and arrangement, but new in material, that they will reject the idea of involuntary remembrance of something originally experienced as the basis of all Art. Ruskin says of great artists: "Imagine all that any of these men had seen or heard in the whole course of their lives, laid up accurately in their memories as in vast storehouses, extending,

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Painters*, IV., Chap. II., p. 28.

with the poets, even to the slightest intonations of syllables heard in the beginning of their lives, and with the painters, down to minute folds of drapery, and shapes of leaves or stones; and over all this unindexed and immeasurable mass of treasure, the imagination brooding and wandering, but dream-gifted, so as to summon at any moment exactly such groups of ideas as shall justly fit each other."<sup>1</sup> This is the explanation of their genius, as far as it can be explained.

Genius is rarely able to give any account of its own processes. But those who have had ample opportunities of intimately knowing the growth of works in the minds of artists, will bear me out in saying that a vivid memory supplies the elements from a thousand different sources, most of which are quite beyond the power of localisation—the experience of yesterday being strangely intermingled with the dim suggestions of early years, the tones heard in childhood sounding through the diapason of sorrowing maturity; and all these kaleidoscopic fragments are recomposed into images that seem to have a corresponding reality of their own.

### 5. *Idealism and Realism.*

As all Art depends on Vision, so the different kinds of Art depend on the different ways in which minds look at things. The painter can only put into his pictures what he sees in Nature; and what he sees

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Painters*, IV., Chap. II., p. 29.

will be different from what another sees. A poetical mind sees noble and affecting suggestions in details which the prosaic mind will interpret prosaically. And the true meaning of Idealism is precisely this vision of realities in their highest and most affecting forms, not in the vision of something removed from or opposed to realities. Titian's grand picture of "Peter the Martyr" is, perhaps, as instructive an example as could be chosen of successful Idealism; because in it we have a marvellous presentation of reality as seen by a poetic mind. The figure of the flying monk might have been equally real, if it had been an ignoble presentation of terror—the superb tree, which may almost be called an actor in the drama, might have been painted with even greater minuteness, though not perhaps with equal effect upon us, if it had arrested our attention by its details—the dying martyr and the noble assassin might have been made equally real in more vulgar types—but the triumph achieved by Titian is that the mind is filled with a vision of poetic beauty which is felt to be real.<sup>1</sup> An equivalent reality, without the ennobling beauty, would have made the picture a fine piece of realistic art. It is because of this poetic way of seeing things that one painter will give a faithful representation of a very common scene which shall nevertheless affect all sensitive minds as ideal, whereas another painter will represent the same with no greater fidelity, but with a complete absence of

<sup>1</sup> A reproduction of the painting will be found in Heath's *Titian* (opp. p. 44).

poetry. The greater the fidelity, the greater will be the merit of each representation; for if a man pretends to represent an object, he pretends to represent it accurately: the only difference is what the poetical or prosaic mind sees in the object.

Of late years there has been a reaction against conventionalism which called itself Idealism, in favour of *detailism* which calls itself Realism. As a reaction it has been of service; but it has led to much false criticism, and not a little false art, by an obtrusiveness of Detail and a preference for the Familiar, under the misleading notion of adherence to Nature. If the words Nature and Natural could be entirely banished from language about Art there would be some chance of coming to a rational philosophy of the subject; at present the excessive vagueness and shiftiness of these terms cover any amount of sophism. The pots and pans of Teniers and Van Mieris are natural; the passions and humours of Shakspeare and Molière are natural; the angels of Fra Angelico and Luini are natural; the Sleeping Fawn and Fates of Phidiás are natural; the cows and misty marshes of Cuyp and the vacillations of Hamlet are equally natural. In fact the natural means *truth of kind*. Each kind of character, each kind of representation, must be judged by itself. Whereas the vulgar error of criticism is to judge of one kind by another, and generally, to judge the higher by the lower, to remonstrate with Hamlet for not having the speech and manner of Mr. Jones, to wish that Fra Angelico could have seen with the eyes of the Carracci, to wish

verse had been prose, and that ideal tragedy were acted with the easy manner acceptable in drawing-rooms.

The rage for "realism," which is healthy in as far as it insists on truth, has become unhealthy, in as far as it confounds truth with familiarity, and predominance of unessential details. There are other truths besides coats and waistcoats, pots and pans, drawing-rooms and suburban villas.<sup>1</sup> Life has other aims besides those which occupy the conversation of "Society." And the painter who devotes years to a work representing modern life, yet calls for even more attention to a waistcoat than to the face of a philosopher, may exhibit truth of detail which will delight the tailor-mind, but he is defective in artistic truth, because he ought to be representing something higher than waistcoats, and because our thoughts on modern life fall very casually and without emphasis on waistcoats. In Piloty's much-admired picture of the "Death of Wallenstein" (at Munich), the truth with which the carpet, the velvet, and all other accessories are painted, is certainly remarkable; but the falsehood of giving prominence to such details in a picture representing the dead Wallenstein—as if they were the objects which could possibly arrest our attention and excite our sympathies in such a

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lewes's article, "Realism in Art," published in the *Westminster Review* for October 1858. "Only those works which are distinguished by any felicity of realism in their treatment are capable of conveying any durable pleasure to the cultivated reader, and this in exact proportion to the truthfulness of the treatment."

spectacle—is a falsehood of the realistic school. If a man means to paint upholstery, by all means let him paint it so as to delight and deceive an upholsterer; but if he means to paint a human tragedy, the upholsterer must be subordinate, and velvet must not draw our eyes away from faces.

I have digressed a little from my straight route because I wish to guard the Principle of Vision from certain misconceptions which might arise on a simple statement of it. The principle insists on the artist assuring himself that he distinctly sees what he attempts to represent. *What* he sees, and *how* he represents it, depend on other principles. To make even this principle of Vision thoroughly intelligible in its application to all forms of Literature and Art, it must be considered in connection with the two other principles—Sincerity and Beauty, which are involved in all successful works. In the next chapter we shall treat of Sincerity.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE PRINCIPLE OF SINCERITY.

#### 1. *Literature and the Public.*

IT is always understood as an expression of condemnation when anything in Literature or Art is said to be done for effect; and yet to produce an effect is the aim and end of both.

There is nothing beyond a verbal ambiguity here if we look at it closely, and yet there is a corresponding uncertainty in the conception of Literature and Art commonly entertained, which leads many writers and many critics into the belief that what are called "effects" should be sought, and when found must succeed. It is desirable to clear up this moral ambiguity, as I may call it, and to show that the real method of securing the legitimate effect is not to aim at it, but to aim at the truth, relying on that for securing effect. The condemnation of whatever is "done for effect" obviously springs from indignation at a disclosed insincerity in the artist, who is self-convicted of having neglected truth for the sake of our applause; and we refuse our applause to the flatterer, or give it contemptuously as to a mountebank whose dexterity has amused us.



It is unhappily true that much insincere Literature and Art, executed solely with a view to effect, does succeed by deceiving the public. But this is only because the simulation of truth or the blindness of the public conceals the insincerity. As a maxim, the Principle of Sincerity is admitted. Nothing but what is true, or is held to be true, can succeed; anything which looks like insincerity is condemned. In this respect we may compare it with the maxim of Honesty the best policy. No far-reaching intellect fails to perceive that if all men were uniformly upright and truthful, Life would be more victorious, and Literature more noble. We find, however, both in Life and Literature, a practical disregard of the truth of these propositions almost equivalent to a disbelief in them. Many men are keenly alive to the social advantages of honesty—in the practice of others. They are also strongly impressed with the conviction that in their own particular case the advantage will sometimes lie in not strictly adhering to the rule. Honesty is doubtless the best policy in the long run; but somehow the run here seems so very long, and a short-cut opens such allurements to impatient desire. It requires a firm calm insight, or a noble habit of thought, to steady the wavering mind, and direct it away from delusive short-cuts: to make belief practice, and forego immediate triumph. Many of those who unhesitatingly admit Sincerity to be one great condition of success in Literature find it difficult, and often impossible, to resist the temptation of an insincerity which promises immediate advan-

tage. It is not only the grocers who sand their sugar before prayers. Writers who know well enough that the triumph of falsehood is an unholy triumph, are not deterred from falsehood by that knowledge. They know, perhaps, that, even if undetected, it will press on their own consciences; but the knowledge avails them little. The immediate pressure of the temptation is yielded to, and Sincerity remains a text to be preached to others. To gain applause they will misstate facts, to gain victory in argument they will misrepresent the opinions they oppose; and they suppress the rising misgivings by the dangerous sophism that to discredit error is good work, and by the hope that no one will detect the means by which the work is effected. The saddest aspect of this procedure is that in Literature, as in Life, a temporary success often does reward dishonesty. It would be insincere to conceal it. To gain a reputation as discoverers men will invent or suppress facts. To appear learned, they will array their writings in the ostentation of borrowed citations. To solicit the "sweet voices" of the crowd, they will feign sentiments they do not feel, and utter what they think the crowd will wish to hear, keeping back whatever the crowd will hear with disapproval. And, as I said, such men often succeed for a time; the fact is so, and we must not pretend that it is otherwise. But it no more disturbs the fundamental truth of the Principle of Sincerity than the perturbations in the orbit of Mars disturb the truth of Kepler's law.

It is impossible to deny that dishonest men often grow rich and famous, becoming powerful in their parish or in parliament. Their portraits shimmer from shop windows; and they live and die respected. This success is theirs; yet it is not the success which a noble soul will envy. Apart from the risk of discovery and infamy, there is the certainty of a conscience ill at ease, or if at ease, so blunted in its sensibilities, so given over to lower lusts, that a healthy instinct recoils from such a state. Observe, moreover, that in Literature the possible rewards of dishonesty are small, and the probability of detection great. In Life a dishonest man is chiefly moved by desires towards some tangible result of money or power; if he get these he has got all. The man of letters has a higher aim; the very object of his toil is to secure the sympathy and respect of men; and the rewards of his toil may be paid in money, fame, or consciousness of earnest effort. The first of these may sometimes be gained without Sincerity. Fame may also, for a time, be erected on an unstable ground, though it will inevitably be destroyed again. But the last and not least reward is to be gained by every one without fear of failure, without risk of change. Sincere work is good work, be it never so humble; and sincere work is not only an indestructible delight to the worker by its very genuineness, but is immortal in the best sense, for it lives for ever in its influence. There is no good Dictionary, not even a good Index, that is not in this sense priceless, for it has honestly furthered the work of the world,

saving labour to others, setting an example to successors. Whether I make a careful Index, or an inaccurate one, will probably in no respect affect the money-payment I shall receive. My sins will never fall heavily on me; my virtue will gain me neither extra pence nor praise. I shall be hidden by obscurity from the indignation of those whose valuable time is wasted over my pretence at accuracy, as from the silent gratitude of those whose time is saved by my honest fidelity. The consciousness of faithfulness even to the poor index-maker may be a better reward than pence or praise; but of course we cannot expect the unconscientious to believe this. If I sand my sugar, and tell lies over my counter, I may gain the rewards of dishonesty, or I may be overtaken by its Nemesis. But if I am faithful in my work the reward cannot be withheld from me. The obscure workers, who, knowing that they will never earn renown yet feel an honourable pride in doing their work faithfully, may be likened to the benevolent who feel a noble delight in performing generous actions which will never be known to be theirs, the only end they seek in such actions being the good which is wrought for others, and their delight being the sympathy with others.

I should be ashamed to insist on truths so little likely to be disputed did they not point directly at the great source of bad Literature, which, as was said in our first chapter, springs from a want of proper moral guidance rather than from deficiency of talent. The Principle of Sincerity comprises all

those qualities of courage, patience, honesty, and simplicity which give momentum to talent and determine successful Literature. It is not enough to have the eye to see; there must also be the courage to express what the eye has seen, and the steadfastness of a trust in truth. Insight, imagination, grace of style are potent; but their power is delusive unless sincerely guided. If any one should object that this is a truism, the answer is ready: Writers disregard its truth, as traders disregard the truism of honesty being the best policy. Nay, as even the most upright men are occasionally liable to swerve from the truth, so the most upright authors will in some passages desert a perfect sincerity; yet the ideal of both is rigorous truth. Men who are never flagrantly dishonest are at times unveracious in small matters, colouring or suppressing facts with a conscious purpose; and writers who never stole an idea nor pretended to honours for which they had not striven, may be found lapsing into small insincerities, speaking a language which is not theirs, uttering opinions which they expect to gain applause rather than the opinions really believed by them. But if few men are perfectly and persistently sincere, Sincerity is nevertheless the only enduring strength.

The principle is universal, stretching from the highest purposes of Literature down to its smallest details. It underlies the labour of the philosopher, the investigator, the moralist, the poet, the novelist, the critic, the historian, and the compiler. It is for it he

visible in the publication of opinions, in the structure of sentences, and in the fidelity of citations. Men utter insincere thoughts, they express themselves in echoes and affectations, and they are careless or dishonest in their use of the labours of others, all the time believing in the virtue of sincerity, all the time trying to make others believe honesty to be the best policy.

Let us glance for a moment at the most important applications of the principle. A man must be himself convinced if he is to convince others. The prophet must be his own disciple, or he will make none. Enthusiasm is contagious: belief creates belief. There is no influence issuing from unbelief or from languid acquiescence. This is peculiarly noticeable in Art, because Art depends on sympathy for its influence, and unless the artist has felt the emotions he depicts we remain unmoved: in proportion to the depth of his feeling is our sympathetic response; in proportion to the shallowness or falsehood of his presentation is our coldness or indifference. Many writers who have been fond of quoting the *si vis me flere*<sup>1</sup> of Horace have written as if they did not believe a word of it; for they have been silent on their own convictions, suppressed their own experience, and falsified their own feelings to repeat the convictions and fine phrases of another. I am sorry that my experience assures me that many of those who will read with complete assent all here written respecting the power

<sup>1</sup> *De Arte Poetica*, l. 102. "If you wish me to weep, you must yourself grieve first."

of Sincerity, will basely desert their allegiance to the truth the next time they begin to write; and they will desert it because their misguided views of Literature prompt them to think more of what the public is likely to applaud than of what is worth applause; unfortunately for them, their estimation of this likelihood is generally based on a very erroneous assumption of public wants: they grossly mistake the taste they pander to.

## 2. *The Value of Sincerity.*

In all sincere speech there is power, not necessarily great power, but as much as the speaker is capable of. Speak for yourself and from yourself, or be silent. It can be of no good that you should tell in your "clever," feeble way what another has already told us with the dynamic energy of conviction. If you can tell us something that your own eyes have seen, your own mind has thought, your own heart has felt, you will have power over us, and all the real power that is possible for you. If what you have seen is trivial, if what you have thought is erroneous, if what you have felt is feeble, it would assuredly be better that you should not speak at all; but if you insist on speaking, Sincerity will secure the uttermost of power.

The delusions of self-love cannot be prevented, but intellectual misconceptions as to the means of achieving success may be corrected. Thus although it may not be possible for any introspection to dis-

cover whether we have genius or effective power, it is quite possible to know whether we are trading upon borrowed capital, and whether the eagle's feathers have been picked up by us, or grow from our own wings. I hear some one of my young readers exclaim against the disheartening tendency of what is here said. Ambitious of success, and conscious that he has no great resources within his own experience, he shrinks from the idea of being thrown upon his naked faculty and limited resources, when he feels himself capable of dexterously using the resources of others, and so producing an effective work. "Why," he asks, "must I confine myself to my own small experience, when I feel persuaded that it will interest no one? Why express the opinions to which my own investigations have led me when I suspect that they are incomplete, perhaps altogether erroneous, and when I know that they will not be popular because they are unlike those which have hitherto found favour? Your restrictions would reduce two-thirds of our writers to silence!"

This reduction would, I suspect, be welcomed by every one except the gagged writers; but as the idea of its being operative is too chimerical for us to entertain it, and as the purpose of these pages is to expound the principles of success and failure, not to make Quixotic onslaughts on the windmills of stupidity and conceit, I answer my young interrogator: "Take warning and do not write. Unless you believe in yourself, only noodles will believe in



you, and they but tepidly. If your experience seems trivial to you, it must seem trivial to us. If your thoughts are not fervid convictions, or sincere doubts, they will not have the power of convictions and doubts. To believe in yourself is the first step; to proclaim your belief the next. You cannot assume the power of another. No jay becomes an eagle by borrowing a few eagle feathers. It is true that your sincerity will not be a guarantee of power. You may believe that to be important and novel which we all recognise as trivial and old. You may be a madman, and believe yourself a prophet. You may be a mere echo, and believe yourself a voice. These are among the delusions against which none of us are protected. But if Sincerity is not necessarily a guarantee of power, it is a necessary condition of power, and no genius or prophet can exist without it."

"The highest merit we ascribe to Moses, Plato, and Milton," says Emerson,<sup>1</sup> "is that they set at nought books and traditions, and spoke not what men thought, but what they thought. A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within; more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages. Yet he dismisses without notice his thought because it is his. In every work of genius we recognise our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty." It is strange that any one who has recognised the individuality of all works of

<sup>1</sup> Essay on "Self-Reliance."

lasting influence, should not also recognise the fact that his own individuality ought to be steadfastly preserved. As Emerson says in continuation: "Great works of art have no more affecting lesson for us than this. They teach us to abide by our spontaneous impressions with good-humoured inflexibility, then most when the whole cry of voices is on the other side. Else to-morrow a stranger will say with masterly good sense, precisely what we have thought and felt all the time, and we shall be forced to take with shame our opinion from another." Accepting the opinions of another and the tastes of another is very different from agreement in opinion and taste. Originality is independence, not rebellion; it is sincerity, not antagonism. Whatever you believe to be true and false, that proclaim to be true and false; whatever you think admirable and beautiful, that should be your model, even if all your friends and all the critics storm at you as a crotchet-monger and an eccentric. Whether the public will feel its truth and beauty at once, or after long years, or never cease to regard it as paradox and ugliness, no man can foresee; enough for you to know that you have done your best, have been true to yourself, and that the utmost power inherent in your work has been displayed.

An orator whose purpose is to persuade men must speak the things they wish to hear; an orator whose purpose is to move men must also avoid disturbing the emotional effect by any obtrusion of intellectual antagonism; but an author whose purpose is to

instruct men, who appeals to the intellect, must be careless of their opinions, and think only of truth. It will often be a question when a man is or is not wise in advancing unpalatable opinions, or in preaching heresies; but it can never be a question that a man should be silent if unprepared to speak the truth as he conceives it. Deference to popular opinion is one great source of bad writing, and is all the more disastrous because the deference is paid to some purely hypothetical requirement. When a man fails to see the truth of certain generally accepted views, there is no law compelling him to provoke animosity by announcing his dissent. He may be excused if he shrink from the lurid glory of martyrdom; he may be justified in not placing himself in a position of singularity. He may even be commended for not helping to perplex mankind with doubts which he feels to be founded on limited and possibly erroneous investigation. But if allegiance to truth lays no stern command upon him to speak out his immature dissent, it does lay a stern command not to speak out hypocritical assent. There are many justifications of silence; there can be none of insincerity.

Nor is this less true of minor questions; it applies equally to opinions on matters of taste and personal feeling. Why should I echo what seem to me the extravagant praises of Raphael's "Transfiguration," when, in truth, I do not greatly admire that famous work? There is no necessity for me to speak on the subject at all; but if I do speak, surely it is to utter

my impressions, and not to repeat what others have uttered. Here, then, is a dilemma; if I say what I really feel about this work, after vainly endeavouring day after day to discover the transcendent merits discovered by thousands (or at least proclaimed by them), there is every likelihood of my incurring the contempt of connoisseurs, and of being reproached with want of taste in art. This is the bugbear which scares thousands. For myself, I would rather incur the contempt of connoisseurs than my own; the reproach of defective taste is more endurable than the reproach of insincerity. Suppose I *am* deficient in the requisite knowledge and sensibility, shall I be less so by pretending to admire what really gives me no exquisite enjoyment? Will the pleasure I feel in pictures be enhanced because other men consider me right in my admiration, or diminished because they consider me wrong? <sup>1</sup>

The opinion of the majority is not lightly to be rejected; but neither is it to be carelessly echoed. There is something noble in the submission to a great

<sup>1</sup> I have never thoroughly understood the painful anxiety of people to be shielded against the dishonouring suspicion of not rightly appreciating pictures, even when the very phrases they use betray their ignorance and insensibility. Many will avow their indifference to music, and almost boast of their ignorance of science; will sneer at abstract theories, and profess the most tepid interest in history, who would feel it an unpardonable insult if you doubted their enthusiasm for painting and the "old masters" (by them secretly identified with the brown masters). It is an insincerity fostered by general pretence. Each man is afraid to declare his real sentiments in the presence of others equally timid. Massive authority overawes genuine feeling.—G. H. L. Cf. *Le Bon, Psychologie des Foules*, Livre II.

renown, which makes all reverence a healthy attitude if it be genuine. When I think of the immense fame of Raphael, and of how many high and delicate minds have found exquisite delight even in the "Transfiguration," and especially when I recall how others of his works have affected me, it is natural to feel some diffidence in opposing the judgment of men whose studies have given them the best means of forming that judgment—a diffidence which may keep me silent on the matter. To start with the assumption that you are right, and all who oppose you are fools, cannot be a safe method. Nor in spite of a conviction that much of the admiration expressed for the "Transfiguration" is lip-homage and tradition, ought the non-admiring to assume that all of it is insincere. It is quite compatible with modesty to be perfectly independent, and with sincerity to be respectful to the opinions and tastes of others. If you express any opinion, you are bound to express your real opinion; let critics and admirers utter what dithyrambs they please. Were this terror of not being thought correct in taste once got rid of, how many stereotyped judgments on books and pictures would be broken up! and the result of this sincerity would be some really valuable criticism. In the presence of Raphael's "Sistine Madonna," Titian's "Peter the Martyr," or Masaccio's great frescoes in the Brancacci Chapel, one feels as if there had been nothing written about these mighty works, so little does any eulogy discriminate the elements of their profound effects, so little have critics expressed their own thoughts, and

feelings. Yet every day some wandering connoisseur stands before these pictures, and at once, without waiting to let them sink deep into his mind, discovers all the merits which are stereotyped in the criticisms, and discovers nothing else. He does not wait to feel; he is impatient to range himself with men of taste; he discards all genuine impressions, replacing them with vague conceptions of what he is expected to see.

Inasmuch as success must be determined by the relation between the work and the public, the sincerity which leads a man into open revolt against established opinions may seem to be an obstacle. Indeed, publishers, critics, and friends are always loud in their prophecies against originality and independence on this very ground; they do their utmost to stifle every attempt at novelty, because they fix their eyes upon a hypothetical public taste, and think that only what has already been proved successful can again succeed; forgetting that whatever has once been done need not be done over again, and forgetting that what is now commonplace was once originality. There are cases in which a disregard of public opinion will inevitably call forth opprobrium and neglect; but there is no case in which Sincerity is not strength. If I advance new views in Philosophy or Theology, I cannot expect to have many adherents among minds altogether unprepared for such views; yet it is certain that even those who most fiercely oppose me will recognise the power of my voice if it is not a mere echo; and the very novelty will challenge

attention, and at last gain adherents if my views have any real insight. At any rate the point to be considered is this, that whether the novel views excite opposition or applause, the one condition of their success is that they be believed in by the propagator. The public can only be really moved by what is genuine. Even an error if believed in will have greater force than an insincere truth. Lip-advocacy only rouses lip-homage. It is belief which gives momentum.

Nor is it any serious objection to what is here said, that insincerity and timid acquiescence in the opinion and tastes of the public do often gain applause and temporary success. Sanding the sugar is not immediately unprofitable. There is an unpleasant popularity given to falsehood in this world of ours; but we love the truth notwithstanding, and with a more enduring love. Who does not know what it is to listen to public speakers pouring forth expressions of hollow belief and sham enthusiasm, snatching at commonplaces with a fervour as of faith, emphasising insincerities as if to make up by emphasis what is wanting in feeling, all the while saying not only what they do not believe, but what the listeners *know* they do not believe, and what the listeners, though they roar assent, do not themselves believe—a turbulence of sham, the very noise of which stuns the conscience? Is such an orator really enviable, although thunders of applause may have greeted his efforts? Is that success, although the newspapers all over the kingdom may be reporting the speech? What influence

remains when the noise of the shouts has died away? Whereas, if on the same occasion one man gave utterance to a sincere thought, even if it were not a very wise thought, although the silence of the public—perhaps its hisses—may have produced an impression of failure, yet there is success, for the thought will reappear and mingle with the thoughts of men to be adopted or combated by them, and may perhaps in a few years mark out the speaker as a man better worth listening to than the noisy orator whose insincerity was so much cheered.

The same observation applies to books. An author who waits upon the times, and utters only what he thinks the world will like to hear, who sails with the stream, admiring everything which it is "correct taste" to admire, despising everything which has not yet received that Hall-mark, sneering at the thoughts of a great thinker not yet accepted as such, and slavishly repeating the small phrases of a thinker who has gained renown, flippant and contemptuous towards opinions which he has not taken the trouble to understand, and never venturing to oppose even the errors of men in authority, such an author may indeed by dint of a certain dexterity in assorting the mere husks of opinion gain the applause of reviewers, who will call him a thinker, and of indolent men and women who will pronounce him "so clever"; but triumphs of this kind are like oratorical triumphs after dinner. Every autumn the earth is strewn with the dead leaves of such vernal successes.



*3. Sincerity as Related to Vision.*

I would not have the reader conclude that because I advocate plain-speaking even of unpopular views, I mean to imply that originality and sincerity are always in opposition to public opinion. There are many points both of doctrine and feeling in which the world is not likely to be wrong. But in all cases it is desirable that men should not pretend to believe opinions which they really reject, or express emotions they do not feel. And this rule is universal. Even truthful and modest men will sometimes violate the rule under the mistaken idea of being eloquent by means of the diction of eloquence. This is a source of bad Literature. There are certain views in Religion, Ethics, and Politics which readily lend themselves to eloquence, because eloquent men have written largely on them, and the temptation to secure this facile effect often seduces men to advocate these views, in preference to views they really see to be more rational. That this eloquence at second-hand is but feeble in its effect does not restrain others from repeating it. Experience never seems to teach them that grand speech comes only from grand thoughts, passionate speech from passionate emotions. The pomp and roll of words, the trick of phrase, the rhythm and the gesture of an orator, may all be imitated, but not his eloquence. No man was ever eloquent by trying to be eloquent, but only by being so. Trying leads to the vice of "fine writing"—the plague-spot of Literature, not only unhealthy in itself,

and vulgarising the grand language which should be reserved for great thoughts, but encouraging that tendency to select only those views upon which a spurious enthusiasm can most readily graft the representative abstractions and stirring suggestions which will move public applause. The "fine writer" will always prefer the opinion which is striking to the opinion which is true. He frames his sentences by the ear, and is only dissatisfied with them when their cadences are ill-distributed, or their diction is too familiar. It seldom occurs to him that a sentence should accurately express his meaning and no more; indeed there is not often a definite meaning to be expressed, for the thought which arose vanished while he tried to express it, and the sentence, instead of being determined by and moulded on a thought, is determined by some verbal suggestion. Open any book or periodical, and see how frequently the writer does not, cannot, mean what he says; and you will observe that in general the defect does not arise from any poverty in our language, but from the habitual carelessness which allows expressions to be written down unchallenged provided they are sufficiently harmonious, and not glaringly inadequate.

The slapdash insincerity of modern style entirely sets at nought the first principle of writing, which is accuracy. The art of writing is not, as many seem to imagine, the art of bringing fine phrases into rhythmical order, but the art of placing before the reader intelligible symbols of the thoughts and feelings in the writer's mind. Endeavour to be faithful, and if

there is any beauty in your thought, your style will be beautiful; if there is any real emotion to express, the expression will be moving. Never rouge your style. Trust to your native pallor rather than to cosmetics. Try to make us see what you see and to feel what you feel, and banish from your mind whatever phrases others may have used to express what was in their thoughts, but is not in yours. Have you never observed what a slight impression writers have produced in spite of a profusion of images, antitheses, witty epigrams, and rolling periods, whereas some simpler style, altogether wanting in such "brilliant passage," has gained the attention and respect of thousands? Whatever is stuck on as ornament affects us as ornament; we do not think an old hag young and handsome because the jewels flash from her brow and bosom; if we envy her wealth, we do not admire her beauty.

What "fine writing" is to prosaists, insincere imagery is to poets: it is introduced for effect, not used as expression. To the real poet an image comes spontaneously, or if it comes as an afterthought, it is chosen because it expresses his meaning and helps to paint the picture which is in his mind, not because it is beautiful in itself. It is a symbol, not an ornament. Whether the image rises slowly before the mind during the contemplation, or is seen in the same flash which discloses the picture, in each case it arises by natural association, and is *seen*, not *sought*. The inferior poet is dissatisfied with what he sees, and casts about in search after something more striking.

He does not wait till an image is borne in upon the tide of memory, he seeks for an image that will be picturesque; and being without the delicate selective instinct which guides the fine artist, he generally chooses something which we feel to be not exactly in its right place. He thus—

"With gold and silver covers every part,  
And hides with ornament his want of art."<sup>1</sup>

Be true to your own soul, and do not try to express the thought of another. "If some people," says Ruskin, "really see angels where others see only empty space, let them paint the angels: only let not anybody else think *he* can paint an angel too, on any calculated principles of the angelic."<sup>2</sup> Unhappily this is precisely what so many will attempt, inspired by the success of the angelic painter. Nor will the failure of others warn them.

Whatever is sincerely felt or believed, whatever forms part of the imaginative experience, and is not simply imitation or hearsay, may fitly be given to the world, and will always maintain an infinite superiority over imitative splendour; because although it by no means follows that whatever has formed part of the artist's experience must be impressive, or can do without artistic presentation, yet his artistic power will always be greater over his own material than over

<sup>1</sup> "Poets like painters, thus, unskill'd to place  
The naked nature and the living grace,  
With gold and jewels cover ev'ry part,  
And hide with ornaments their want of art."

—Pope's "Essay on Criticism," ll. 293-296.

<sup>2</sup> *Modern Painters*, IV., Chap. II., p. 17.

another's. Emerson has well remarked that "those facts, words, persons, which dwell in a man's memory without his being able to say why, remain, because they have a relation to him not less real for being as yet unapprehended. They are symbols of value to him, as they can interpret part of his consciousness which he would vainly seek words for in the conventional images of books and other minds. What attracts my attention shall have it, as I will go to the man who knocks at my door, while a thousand persons, as worthy, go by it, to whom I give no regard. It is enough that these particulars speak to me. A few anecdotes, a few traits of character, manners, face, a few incidents have an emphasis in your memory out of all proportion to their apparent significance, if you measure them by the ordinary standards. They relate to your gift. Let them have their weight, and do not reject them, and cast about for illustrations and facts more usual in literature."<sup>1</sup>

In the notes to the last edition of his poems, Wordsworth specified the particular occasions which furnished him with particular images. It was the things he had *seen* which he put into his verses; and that is why they affect us. It matters little whether the poet draws his images directly from present experience, or indirectly from memory—whether the sight of the slow-sailing swan, that "floats double, swan and shadow"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Essay on "Spiritual Laws."

<sup>2</sup> "Let . . .

The swan on still St. Mary's Lake  
Float double, swan and shadow."

—Yarrow Unvisited.

be at once transferred to the scene of the poem he is writing, or come back to him in after years to complete some picture in his mind; enough that the image be suggested, and not sought.

The sentence from Ruskin, quoted just now, will guard against the misconception that a writer, because told to rely on his own experience, is enjoined to forego the glory and delight of creation even of fantastic types. He is only told never to pretend to see what he has not seen. He is urged to follow Imagination in her most erratic course, though like a will-o'-wisp she lead over marsh and fen away from the haunts of mortals; but not to pretend that he is following a will-o'-wisp when his vagrant fancy never was allured by one. It is idle to paint fairies and goblins unless you have a genuine vision of them which forces you to paint them. They are poetical objects, but only to poetic minds. "Be a plain topographer if you possibly can," says Ruskin, "if Nature meant you to be anything else, she will force you to it; but never try to be a prophet; go on quietly with your hard camp-work, and the spirit will come to you in the camp, as it did to Eldad and Medad, if you are appointed to have it."<sup>1</sup> Yes: if you are appointed to have it; if your faculties are such that this high success is possible, it will come, provided the faculties are employed with sincerity. Otherwise it cannot come. No insincere effort can secure it.

If the advice I give to reject every insincerity in writing seem cruel, because it robs the writer of so

many of his effects—if it seem disheartening to earnestly warn a man not to *try* to be eloquent, but only to *be* eloquent when his thoughts move with an impassioned *largo*—if throwing a writer back upon his naked faculty seem especially distasteful to those who have a painful misgiving that their faculty is small, and that the uttermost of their own power would be far from impressive, my answer is that I have no hope of dissuading feeble writers from the practice of insincerity, but as under no circumstances can they become good writers and achieve success, my analysis has no reference to them, my advice has no aim at them.

It is to the young and strong, to the ambitious and the earnest, that my words are addressed. It is to wipe the film from their eyes, and make them see, as they will see directly the truth is placed before them, how easily we are all seduced into greater or less insincerity of thought, of feeling, and of style, either by reliance on other writers, from whom we catch the trick of thought and turn of phrase, or from some preconceived view of what the public will prefer. It is to the young and strong I say: Watch vigilantly every phrase you write, and assure yourself that it expresses what you mean; watch vigilantly every thought you express, and assure yourself that it is yours, not another's; you may share it with another, but you must not adopt it from him for the nonce. Of course, if you are writing humorously or dramatically, you will not be expected to write your own serious opinions. Humour may take its

utmost licence, yet be sincere. The dramatic genius may incarnate itself in a hundred shapes, yet in each it will speak what it feels to be the truth. If you are imaginatively representing the feelings of another, as in some playful exaggeration or some dramatic personation, the truth required of you is imaginative truth, not your personal views and feelings. But when you write in your own person you must be rigidly veracious, neither pretending to admire what you do not admire, or to despise what in secret you rather like, nor surcharging your admiration and enthusiasm to bring you into unison with the public chorus. This vigilance may render Literature more laborious; but no one ever supposed that success was to be had on easy terms; and if you only write one sincere page where you might have written twenty insincere pages, the one page is worth writing—it is Literature.<sup>1</sup>

Sincerity is not only effective and honourable, it is also much less difficult than is commonly supposed. To take a trifling example: If for some reason I cannot, or do not, choose to verify a quotation which may be useful to my purpose, what is to prevent my saying that the quotation is taken at second-hand? It is true, if my quotations are for the most part second-hand and are acknowledged as such, my erudition will appear scanty. But it will only appear what it is. Why should I pretend to an erudition

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. iii., chap. iii.; M. Arnold's essay on *Wordsworth*; Emerson's essay on *Poetry and Imagination*, the section on "Veracity."



which is not mine? Sincerity forbids it. Prudence whispers that the pretence is, after all, vain, because those, and those alone, who can rightly estimate erudition will infallibly detect my pretence, whereas those whom I have deceived were not worth deceiving. Yet in spite of Sincerity and Prudence, how shamelessly men compile second-hand references, and display in borrowed footnotes a pretence of labour and of accuracy! I mention this merely to show how, even in the humbler class of compilers, the Principle of Sincerity may find fit illustrations, and how honest work, even in references, belongs to the same category as honest work in philosophy or poetry.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE PRINCIPLE OF BEAUTY.

#### 1. *The Secret of Style.*

IT is not enough that a man has clearness of Vision, and reliance on Sincerity, he must also have the art of Expression, or he will remain obscure. Many have had

“ The visionary eye, the faculty to see  
The thing that hath been as the thing which is,”

but either from native defect, or the mistaken bias of education, have been frustrated in the attempt to give their visions beautiful or intelligible shape. The art which could give them shape is doubtless intimately dependent on clearness of eye and sincerity of purpose, but it is also something over and above these, and comes from an organic aptitude not less special, when possessed with fulness, than the aptitude for music or drawing. Any instructed person can write, as any one can learn to draw; but to write well, to express ideas with felicity and force, is not an accomplishment but a talent. The power of seizing unapparent relations of things is not always conjoined

with the power of selecting the fittest verbal symbols by which they can be made apparent to others: the one is the power of the thinker, the other the power of the writer.

"Style," says De Quincey, "has two separate functions—first, to brighten the *intelligibility* of a subject which is obscure to the understanding; secondly, to regenerate the normal *power* and impressiveness of a subject which has become dormant to the sensibilities. . . . Decaying lineaments are to be retraced, and faded colouring to be refreshed."<sup>1</sup> To effect these purposes we require a rich verbal memory from which to select the symbols best fitted to call up images in the reader's mind, and we also require the delicate selective instinct to guide us in the choice and arrangement of those symbols, so that the rhythm and cadence may agreeably attune the mind, rendering it receptive to the impressions meant to be communicated. A copious verbal memory, like a copious memory of facts, is only one source of power, and without the high controlling faculty of the artist may lead to diffusive indecision. Just as one man, gifted with keen insight, will from a small stock of facts extricate unapparent relations to which others, rich in knowledge, have been blind; so will a writer, gifted with a fine instinct, select from a narrow range of phrases symbols of beauty and of power utterly beyond the reach of commonplace minds. It is often considered, both by writers and readers, that fine language makes fine writers; yet no one supposes

<sup>1</sup> Essay on "Language," *Works*, vol. viii. p. 94.

that fine colours make a fine painter. The *copia verborum* is often a weakness and a snare. As Arthur Helps says, men use several epithets in the hope that one of them may fit. But the artist knows which epithet does fit, uses that, and rejects the rest. The characteristic weakness of bad writers is inaccuracy: their symbols do not adequately express their ideas. Pause but for a moment over their sentences, and you perceive that they are using language at random, the choice being guided rather by some indistinct association of phrases, or some broken echoes of familiar sounds, than by any selection of words to represent ideas. I read the other day of the truck system being "rampant" in a certain district; and every day we may meet with similar echoes of familiar words which betray the flaccid condition of the writer's mind drooping under the labour of expression.

Except in the rare cases of great dynamic thinkers whose thoughts are as turning-points in the history of our race, it is by Style that writers gain distinction, by Style they secure their immortality.<sup>1</sup> In a lower sphere many are remarked as writers although they may lay no claim to distinction as thinkers, if they have the faculty of felicitously expressing the ideas of others; and many who are really remarkable as thinkers gain but slight recognition from the public, simply because in them the faculty of expression is

<sup>1</sup> "Les ouvrages bien écrits seront les seuls qui passeront à la postérité: la quantité des connaissances, la singularité des faits, ne sont pas de sûrs garants de l'immortalité."—BUFFON, *Discours sur le Style*.

feel. In proportion as the work passes from the sphere of passionless intelligence to that of impassioned intelligence, from the region of demonstration to the region of emotion, the art of Style becomes more complex, its necessity more imperious. But even in Philosophy and Science the art is both subtle and necessary; the choice and arrangement of the fitting symbols, though less difficult than in Art, is quite indispensable to success. If the distinction which I formerly drew<sup>1</sup> between the Scientific and the Artistic tendencies be accepted, it will disclose a corresponding difference in the Style which suits a ratiocinative exposition fixing attention on abstract relations, and an emotive exposition fixing attention on objects as related to the feelings. We do not expect the scientific writer to stir our emotions, otherwise than by the secondary influences which arise from our awe and delight at the unveiling of new truths. In his own researches he should extricate himself from the perturbing influences of emotion, and consequently he should protect us from such suggestions in his exposition. Feeling too often smites intellect with blindness, and intellect too often paralyses the free play of emotion, not to call for a decisive separation of the two. But this separation is no ground for the disregard of Style in works of pure demonstration—as we shall see by-and-by.

The Principle of Beauty is only another name for Style, which is an art, incommunicable as are all other arts, but like them subordinated to laws founded on

psychological conditions. The laws constitute the Philosophy of Criticism; and I shall have to ask the reader's indulgence if for the first time I attempt to expound them scientifically in the chapter to which the present is only an introduction. A knowledge of these laws, even presuming them to be accurately expounded, will no more give a writer the power of felicitous expression than a knowledge of the laws of colour, perspective, and proportion will enable a critic to paint a picture. But all good writing must conform to these laws; all bad writing will be found to violate them. And the utility of the knowledge will be that of a constant monitor, warning the artist of the errors into which he has slipped, or into which he may slip if unwarned.

How is it that while every one acknowledges the importance of Style, and numerous critics from Quintilian and Longinus down to Quarterly Reviewers have written upon it, very little has been done towards a satisfactory establishment of principles? Is it not partly because the critics have seldom held the true purpose of Style steadily before their eyes, and still seldomer justified their canons by deducing them from psychological conditions? To my apprehension they seem to have mistaken the real sources of influence, and have fastened attention upon some accidental or collateral details, instead of tracing the direct connection between effects and causes. Misled by the splendour of some great renown, they have concluded that to write like Cicero or to paint like Titian must be the pathway to success; which is true in one

sense, and profoundly false as they understand it. One pestilent contagious error issued from this misconception, namely, that all maxims confirmed by the practice of the great artists must be maxims for the art; although a close examination might reveal that the practice of these artists may have been the result of their peculiar individualities or of the state of culture at their epoch. A true Philosophy of Criticism would exhibit in how far such maxims were universal, as founded on laws of human nature, and in how far adaptations to particular individualities. A great talent will discover new methods. A great success ought to put us on the track of new principles. But the fundamental laws of Style, resting on the truths of human nature, may be illustrated, they cannot be guaranteed by any individual success. Moreover, the strong individuality of the artist will create special modifications of the laws to suit himself, making that excellent or endurable which in other hands would be intolerable. If the purpose of Literature be the sincere expression of the individual's own ideas and feelings, it is obvious that the cant about the "best models" tends to pervert and obstruct that expression. Unless a man thinks and feels precisely after the manner of Cicero and Titian it is manifestly wrong for him to express himself in their way. He may study in them the principles of effect, and try to surprise some of their secrets, but he should resolutely shun all imitation of them. They ought to be illustrations not authorities, studies not models.

## 2. *Imitation of the Classics.*

The fallacy about models is seen at once if we ask this simple question: Will the practice of a great writer justify a solecism in grammar or a confusion in logic? No. Then why should it justify any other detail not to be reconciled with universal truth? If we are forced to invoke the arbitration of reason in the one case, we must do so in the other. Unless we set aside the individual practice whenever it is irreconcilable with general principles, we shall be unable to discriminate in a successful work those merits which *secured* from those demerits which *accompanied* success. Now this is precisely the condition in which Criticism has always been. It has been formal instead of being psychological: it has drawn its maxims from the works of successful artists, instead of ascertaining the psychological principles involved in the effects of those works. When the perplexed dramatist called down curses on the man who invented fifth acts, he never thought of escaping from his tribulation by writing a play in four acts; the formal canon which made five acts indispensable to a tragedy was drawn from the practice of great dramatists, but there was no demonstration of any psychological demand on the part of the audience for precisely five acts.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> English critics are much less pedantic in adherence to "rules" than the French, yet when, many years ago, there appeared a tragedy in three acts, and without a death, these innovations were considered inadmissible; and if the success of the work had been such as to elicit critical discussion, the necessity of five acts and a death would doubtless have been generally insisted on.—G. H. L.



Although no instructed mind will for a moment doubt the immense advantage of the stimulus and culture derived from a reverent familiarity with the works of our great predecessors and contemporaries, there is a pernicious error which has been fostered by many instructed minds, rising out of their reverence for greatness and their forgetfulness of the ends of Literature. This error is the notion of "models," and of fixed canons drawn from the practice of great artists. It substitutes Imitation for Invention; reproduction of old types instead of the creation of new. There is more bad than good work produced in consequence of the assiduous following of models. And we shall seldom be very wide of the mark if in our estimation of youthful productions we place more reliance on their departures from what has been already done, than on their resemblances to the best artists. An energetic crudity, even a riotous absurdity, has more promise in it than a clever and elegant mediocrity, because it shows that the young man is speaking out of his own heart, and struggling to express himself in his own way rather than in the way he finds in other men's books. The early works of original writers are usually very bad; then succeeds a short interval of imitation in which the influence of some favourite author is distinctly traceable; but this does not last long, the native independence of the mind reasserts itself, and although perhaps academic and critical demands are somewhat disregarded, so that the original writer on account of his very originality receives but slight recognition from the

authorities, nevertheless if there is any real power in the voice it soon makes itself felt in the world. There is one word of counsel I would give to young authors, which is that they should be humbly obedient to the truth proclaimed by their own souls, and haughtily indifferent to the remonstrances of critics founded solely on any departure from the truths expressed by others. It by no means follows that because a work is unlike works that have gone before it, therefore it is excellent or even tolerable; it may be original in error or in ugliness; but one thing is certain, that in proportion to its close fidelity to the matter and manner of existing works will be its intrinsic worthlessness. And one of the severest assaults on the fortitude of an unacknowledged writer comes from the knowledge that his critics, with rare exceptions, will judge his work in reference to pre-existing models, and not in reference to the ends of Literature and the laws of human nature. He knows that he will be compared with artists whom he ought not to resemble if his work have truth and originality; and finds himself teased with disparaging remarks which are really compliments in their objections. He can comfort himself by his trust in truth and the sincerity of his own work. He may also draw strength from the reflection that the public and posterity may cordially appreciate the work in which constituted authorities see nothing but failure. The history of Literature abounds in examples of critics being entirely at fault—missing the old familiar landmarks, these

guides at once set up a shout of warning that the path has been missed.

Very noticeable is the fact that of the thousands who have devoted years to the study of the classics, especially to the "niceties of phrase" and "chastity of composition," so much prized in these classics, very few have learned to write with felicity, and not many with accuracy. Native incompetence has doubtless largely influenced this result in men who are insensible to the nicer shades of distinction in terms, and want the subtle sense of congruity; but the false plan of studying "models" without clearly understanding the psychological conditions which the effects involve, without seeing why great writing is effective and where it is merely individual expression, has injured even vigorous minds and paralysed the weak. From a similar mistake hundreds have deceived themselves in trying to catch the trick of phrase peculiar to some distinguished contemporary. In vain do they imitate the Latinisms and antitheses of Johnson, the epigrammatic sentences of Macaulay, the colloquial ease of Thackeray, the cumulative pomp of Milton, the diffusive play of De Quincey: a few friendly or ignorant reviewers may applaud it as "brilliant writing," but the public remains unmoved. It is imitation, and as such it is lifeless.

We see at once the mistake directly we understand that a genuine style is the living body of thought, not a costume that can be put on and off; it is the expression of the writer's mind; it is not less the

incarnation of his thoughts in verbal symbols than a picture is the painter's incarnation of his thoughts in symbols of form and colour.<sup>1</sup> A man may, if it please him, dress his thoughts in the tawdry splendour of a masquerade. But this is no more Literature than the masquerade is Life.

No Style can be good that is not sincere. It must be the expression of its author's mind. There are, of course, certain elements of composition which must be mastered as a dancer learns his steps, but the style of the writer, like the grace of the dancer, is only made effective by such mastery; it springs from a deeper source. Initiation into the rules of construction will save us from some gross errors of composition, but it will not make a style. Still less will imitation of another's manner make one. In our day there are many who imitate Macaulay's short sentences, iterations, antitheses, geographical and historical illustrations, and eighteenth century diction, but who accepts them as Macaulay's? They cannot seize the secret of his charm, because that charm lies in the felicity of his talent, not in the structure of his sentences; in the fulness of his knowledge, not in the character of his illustrations. Other men aim at ease and vigour by discarding Latinisms, and admitting colloquialisms; but vigour and ease are not to be had on recipe. No study of models, no attention to rules, will give the easy turn, the graceful phrase, the simple word, the servid movement, or the large clearness; a picturesque talent will express itself

<sup>1</sup> Cf. De Quincey's essay on "Language," the closing paragraphs.

in concrete images; a genial nature will smile in pleasant turns and innuendoes; a rapid, unhesitating, imperious mind will deliver its quick incisive phrases; a full deliberating mind will overflow in ample paragraphs laden with the weight or parentheses and qualifying suggestions. The style which is good in one case would be vicious in another. The broken rhythm which increases the energy of one style would ruin the *largo* of another. Both are excellencies where both are natural.

We are always disagreeably impressed by an obvious imitation of the manner of another, because we feel it to be an insincerity, and also because it withdraws our attention from the thing said, to the way of saying it. And here lies the great lesson writers have to learn—namely, that they should think of the immediate purpose of their writing, which is to convey truths and emotions, in symbols and images, intelligible and suggestive. The racket-player keeps his eye on the ball he is to strike, not on the racket with which he strikes. If the writer sees vividly, and will say honestly what he sees, and how he sees it, he may want something of the grace and felicity of other men, but he will have all the strength and felicity with which nature has endowed him. More than that he cannot attain, and he will fall very short of it in snatching at the grace which is another's. Do what he will, he cannot escape from the infirmities of his own mind: the affectation, arrogance, ostentation, hesitation, native in the man will taint his style, no matter how closely he may copy the manner of

another. For evil and for good, *le style est de l'homme même*.<sup>1</sup>

The French critics, who are singularly servile to all established reputations, and whose unreasoning idolatry of their own classics is one of the reasons why their Literature is not richer, are fond of declaring with magisterial emphasis that the rules of good taste and the canons of style were fixed once and for ever by their great writers in the seventeenth century. The true ambition of every modern is said to be by careful study of these models to approach (though with no hope of equalling) their chastity and elegance. That a writer of the nineteenth century should express himself in the manner which was admirable in the seventeenth is an absurdity which needs only to be stated. It is not worth refuting. But it never presents itself thus to the French. In their minds it is a lingering remnant of that older superstition which believed the Ancients to have discovered all wisdom, so that if we could only surprise the secret of Aristotle's thoughts and clearly comprehend the drift of Plato's theories (which unhappily was not clear) we should compass all knowledge. How long this superstition lasted cannot accurately be settled; perhaps it is not quite extinct even yet; but we know how little the most earnest students succeeded in surprising the secrets of the universe by reading Greek treatises, and how much by studying the universe itself.

<sup>1</sup> Buffon, *Discours sur le Style*. The passage is commonly misquoted, "le style c'est l'homme même." For a discussion of its meaning, see Lewes's *History of Philosophy*, chapter on Hobbes, note.

Advancing Science daily discredits the superstition; yet the advance of Criticism has not yet wholly discredited the parallel superstition in Art. The earliest thinkers are no longer considered the wisest, but the earliest artists are still proclaimed the finest. Even those who do not believe in this superiority are, for the most part, overawed by tradition and dare not openly question the supremacy of works which in their private convictions hold a very subordinate rank. And this reserve is encouraged by the intemperate scorn of those who question the supremacy without having the knowledge or the sympathy which could fairly appreciate the earlier artists. Attacks on the classics by men ignorant of the classical languages tend to perpetuate the superstition.

But be the merit of the classics, ancient and modern, what it may, no writer can become a classic by imitating them. The principle of Sincerity here ministers to the principle of Beauty by forbidding imitation and enforcing rivalry. Write what you can, and if you have the grace of felicitous expression or the power of energetic expression your style will be admirable and admired. At any rate see that it be your own, and not another's; on no other terms will the world listen to it. You cannot be eloquent by borrowing from the opulence of another; you cannot be humorous by mimicking the whims of another; what was a pleasant smile dimpling his features becomes a grimace on yours.

It will not be supposed that I would have the

great writers disregarded, as if nothing were to be learned from them; but the study of great writers should be the study of general principles as illustrated or revealed in these writers; and if properly pursued it will of itself lead to a condemnation of the notion of models. What we may learn from them is a nice discrimination of the symbols which intelligibly express the shades of meaning and kindle emotion. The writer wishes to give his thoughts a literary form. This is for others, not for himself; consequently he must, before all things, desire to be intelligible, and to be so he must adapt his expressions to the mental condition of his audience. If he employs arbitrary symbols, such as old words in new and unexpected senses, he may be clear as daylight to himself, but to others, dark as fog. And the difficulty of original writing lies in this, that what is new and individual must find expression in old symbols. This difficulty can only be mastered by a peculiar talent, strengthened and rendered nimble by practice, and the commerce with original minds. Great writers should be our companions if we would learn to write greatly; but no familiarity with their manner will supply the place of native endowment. Writers are born, no less than poets, and like poets, they learn to make their native gifts effective. Practice, aiding their vigilant sensibility, teaches them, perhaps unconsciously, certain methods of effective presentation, how one arrangement of words carries with it more power than another, how familiar and concrete expressions are demanded in one place, and in



another place abstract expressions unlogged with disturbing suggestions. Every author thus silently amasses a store of empirical rules, furnished by his own practice, and confirmed by the practice of others. A true Philosophy of Criticism would reduce these empirical rules to science by ranging them under psychological laws, thus demonstrating the validity of the rules, not in virtue of their having been employed by Cicero or Addison, by Burke or Sydney Smith, but in virtue of their conformity with the constancies of human nature.

### 3. *Style in Philosophical and Scientific Literature.*

The importance of Style is generally unsuspected by philosophers and men of science, who are quite aware of its advantage in all departments of *belles lettres*; and if you allude in their presence to the deplorably defective presentation of the ideas in some work distinguished for its learning, its profundity or its novelty, it is probable that you will be despised as a frivolous setter up of manner over matter, a light-minded *dilettante*, unfitted for the simple austerities of science. But this is itself a light-minded contempt; a deeper insight would change the tone, and help to remove the disgraceful slovenliness and feebleness of composition which deface the majority of grave works, except those written by Frenchmen, who have been taught that composition is an art, and that no writer may neglect it. In England and Germany, men who will spare no labour in research, grudge all labour in style;

a morning is cheerfully devoted to verifying a quotation, by one who will not spare ten minutes to reconstruct a clumsy sentence; a reference is sought with ardour, an appropriate expression in lieu of the inexact phrase which first suggests itself does not seem worth seeking. What are we to say to a man who spends a quarter's income on a diamond pin which he sticks in a greasy cravat? a man who calls public attention on him, and appears in a slovenly undress? Am I to bestow applause on some insignificant parade of erudition, and withhold blame from the stupidities of style which surround it?

Had there been a clear understanding of Style as the living body of thought, and not its "dress," which might be more or less ornamental, the error I am noticing would not have spread so widely. But, naturally, when men regarded the grace of style as mere grace of manner, and not as the delicate precision giving form and relief to matter—as mere ornament, stuck on to arrest incurious eyes, and not as effective expression—their sense of the deeper value of matter made them despise such aid. A clearer conception would have rectified this error. The matter is confluent with the manner; and only *through* the style can thought reach the reader's mind. If the manner is involved, awkward, abrupt, obscure, the reader will either be oppressed with a confused sense of cumbrous material which awaits an artist to give it shape, or he will have the labour thrown upon him of extricating the material and reshaping it in his own mind.

How entirely men misconceive the relation of style to thought may be seen in the replies they make when their writing is objected to, or in the ludicrous attempts of clumsy playfulness and tawdry eloquence when they wish to be regarded as writers.

"Le style le moins noble a pourtant sa noblesse,"<sup>1</sup>

and the principle of Sincerity, not less than the suggestions of taste, will preserve the integrity of each style. A philosopher, an investigator, an historian, or a moralist so far from being required to present the graces of a wit, an essayist, a pamphleteer, or a novelist, would be warned off such ground by the necessity of expressing himself sincerely. Pascal, Biot, Buffon, or Laplace are examples of the clearness and beauty with which ideas may be presented wearing all the graces of fine literature, and losing none of the severity of science. Bacon, also, having an opulent and active intellect, spontaneously expressed himself in forms of various excellence. But what a pitiable contrast is presented by Kant! It is true that Kant having a much narrower range of sensibility could have no such ample resource of expression, and he was wise in not attempting to rival the splendour of the *Novum Organum*; but he was not simply unwise, he was extremely culpable in sending forth his thoughts as so much raw material which the public was invited to put into shape as it could. Had he been aware that much of his bad writing was imperfect thinking, and always imperfect

<sup>1</sup> Boileau, *L'Art poétique*, I., l. 80.

adaptation of means to ends, he might have been induced to recast it into more logical and more intelligible sentences, which would have stimulated the reader's mind as much as they now oppress it. Nor had Kant the excuse of a subject too abstruse for clear presentation. The examples of Descartes, Spinoza, Hobbes, and Hume are enough to show how such subjects can be mastered, and the very implication of writing a book is that the writer has mastered his material and can give it intelligible form.<sup>1</sup>

A grave treatise, dealing with a narrow range of subjects or moving amid severe abstractions, demands a gravity and severity of style which is dissimilar to that demanded by subjects of a wider scope or more impassioned impulse; but abstract philosophy has its appropriate elegance no less than mathematics. I do not mean that each subject should necessarily be confined to one special mode of treatment, in the sense which was understood when people spoke of the "dignity of history," and so forth. The style must express the writer's mind; and as variously constituted minds will treat one and the same subject, there will be varieties in their styles. If a severe thinker be also a man of wit, like Bacon, Hobbes, Pascal, or Galileo, the wit will flash its sudden illuminations on the argument; but if he be not a man of wit, and condescends to jest under the impression that by jesting he is giving an airy grace to his argument, we resent it as an impertinence.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. De Quincey's essay on "Style," Part I., on "Rhetoric," and on "Language."

4. *Style in the Sense of Treatment.*

I have throughout used Style in the narrower sense of expression rather than in the wider sense of "treatment" which is sometimes affixed to it. The mode of treating a subject is also no doubt the writer's or the artist's way of expressing what is in his mind, but this is Style in the more general sense, and does not admit of being reduced to laws apart from those of Vision and Sincerity. A man necessarily sees a subject in a particular light—ideal or grotesque, familiar or fanciful, tragic or humorous. He may wander into fairy-land, or move amid representative abstractions; he may follow his wayward fancy in its grotesque combinations, or he may settle down amid the homeliest details of daily life. But having chosen he must be true to his choice. He is not allowed to represent fairy-land as if it resembled Walworth, nor to paint Walworth in the colours of Venice. The truth of consistency must be preserved in his treatment, truth in art meaning of course only truth within the limits of the art; thus the painter may produce the utmost relief he can by means of light and shade, but it is peremptorily forbidden to use actual solidities on a plane surface. He must represent gold by colour, not by sticking gold on his figures.<sup>1</sup> Our

<sup>1</sup> This was done with *naïveté* by the early painters, and is really very effective in the pictures of Gentile da Fabriano—that Paul Veronese of the fifteenth century—as the reader will confess if he has seen the "Adoration of the Magi," in the Florence Academy; but it could not be tolerated now.—G. H. L.

applause is greatly determined by our sense of difficulty overcome, and to stick gold on a picture is an avoidance of the difficulty of painting it.

Truth of presentation has an inexplicable charm for us, and throws a halo around even ignoble objects. A policeman idly standing at the corner of the street, or a sow lazily sleeping against the sun, are not in nature objects to excite a thrill of delight, but a painter may, by the cunning of his art, represent them so as to delight every spectator. The same objects represented by an inferior painter will move only a languid interest; by a still more inferior painter they may be represented so as to please none but the most uncultivated eye. Each spectator is charmed in proportion to his recognition of a triumph over difficulty which is measured by the degree of verisimilitude. The degrees are many. In the lowest the pictured object is so remote from the reality that we simply recognise what the artist meant to represent. In like manner we recognise in poor novels and dramas what the authors mean to be characters, rather than what our experience of life suggests as characteristic.

Not only do we apportion our applause according to the degree of verisimilitude attained, but also according to the difficulty each involves. It is a higher difficulty, and implies a nobler art to represent the movement and complexity of life and emotion than to catch the fixed lineaments of outward aspect. To paint a policeman idly lounging at the street corner with such verisimilitude that we are pleased with the representation, admiring the solidity of the figure, the

texture of the clothes, and the human aspect of the features, is so difficult that we loudly applaud the skill which enables an artist to imitate what in itself is uninteresting; and if the imitation be carried to a certain degree of verisimilitude the picture may be of immense value. But no excellence of representation can make this high art. To carry it into the region of high art, another and far greater difficulty must be overcome; the man must be represented under the strain of great emotion, and we must recognise an equal truthfulness in the subtle indications of great mental agitation, the fleeting characters of which are far less easy to observe and to reproduce than the stationary characters of form and costume. We may often observe how the novelist or dramatist has tolerable success so long as his personages are quiet, or moved only by the vulgar motives of ordinary life, and how fatally uninteresting, because unreal, these very personages become as soon as they are exhibited under the stress of emotion: their language ceases at once to be truthful, and becomes stagey; their conduct is no longer recognisable as that of human beings such as we have known. Here we note a defect of treatment, a mingling of styles, arising partly from defect of vision, and partly from an imperfect sincerity; and success in art will always be found dependent on integrity of style. The Dutch painters, so admirable in their own style, would become pitiable on quitting it for a higher.

But I need not enter at any length upon this subject of treatment. Obviously a work must have charm or it cannot succeed; and the charm will depend on

very complex conditions in the artist's mind. What treatment is in Art, composition is in Philosophy. The general conception of the point of view, and the skilful distribution of the masses, so as to secure the due preparation, development, and culmination, without wasteful prodigality or confusing want of symmetry, constitute Composition, which is to the structure of a treatise what Style—in the narrower sense—is to the structure of sentences. How far Style is reducible to law will be examined in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER VI.

### THE LAWS OF STYLE.

#### *I. Method of Inquiry.*

FROM what was said in the preceding chapter, the reader will understand that our present inquiry is only into the laws which regulate the mechanism of Style. In such an analysis all that constitutes the individuality, the life, the charm of a great writer, must escape. But we may dissect Style, as we dissect an organism, and lay bare the fundamental laws by which each is regulated. And this analogy may indicate the utility of our attempt; the grace and luminousness of a happy talent will no more be acquired by a knowledge of these laws than the force and elasticity of a healthy organism will be given by a knowledge of anatomy; but the mistakes in Style, and the diseases of the organism, may be often avoided, and sometimes remedied, by such knowledge.

On a subject like this, which has for many years engaged the researches of many minds, I shall not be expected to bring forward discoveries; indeed, novelty would not unjustly be suspected of fallacy. The only claim my exposition can have on the reader's attention is that of being an attempt to systematise

what has been hitherto either empirical observation, or the establishment of critical rules on a false basis. I know but of one exception to this sweeping censure, and that is the essay on the "Philosophy of Style," by Mr. Herbert Spencer,<sup>1</sup> where for the first time, I believe, the right method was pursued of seeking in psychological conditions for the true laws of expression.

The aims of Literature being instruction and delight, Style must in varying degrees appeal to our intellect and our sensibilities: sometimes reaching the intellect through the presentation of simple ideas, and at others through the agitating influence of emotions; sometimes awakening the sensibilities through the reflexes of ideas, and sometimes through a direct appeal. A truth may be nakedly expressed so as to stir the intellect alone; or it may be expressed in terms which, without disturbing its clearness, may appeal to our sensibility by their harmony or energy. It is not possible to distinguish the combined influences of clearness, movement, and harmony, so as to assign to each its relative effect; and if in the ensuing pages one law is isolated from another, this must be understood as an artifice inevitable in such investigations.

There are five laws under which all the conditions of Style may be grouped:—

1. *The Law of Economy.*
2. *The Law of Simplicity.*

<sup>1</sup> *Essays, Scientific, Political, and Speculative*, vol. ii.

3. *The Law of Sequence.*

4. *The Law of Climax.*

5. *The Law of Variety.*

It would be easy to reduce these five to three, and range all considerations under Economy, Climax, and Variety; or we might amplify the divisions; but there are reasons of convenience as well as symmetry which give a preference to the five. I had arranged them thus for convenience some years ago, and I now find they express the equivalence of the two great factors of Style—Intelligence and Sensibility. Two out of the five, Economy and Simplicity, more specially derive their significance from intellectual needs; another two, Climax and Variety, from emotional needs; and between these is the Law of Sequence, which is intermediate in its nature, and may be claimed with equal justice by both. The laws of force and the laws of pleasure can only be provisionally isolated in our inquiry; in style they are blended. The following brief estimate of each considers it as an isolated principle undetermined by any other.

2. *The Law of Economy.*

Our inquiry is scientific, not empirical; it therefore seeks the psychological basis for every law, endeavouring to ascertain what condition of a reader's receptivity determines the law. Fortunately for us, in the case of the first and most important law the psychological basis is extremely simple, and may be easily appreciated by a reference to its analogue in Mechanics.

What is the first object of a machine? <sup>1</sup> Effective work—*vis viva*. Every means by which friction can be reduced, and the force thus economised be rendered available, necessarily solicits the constructor's care. He seeks as far as possible to liberate the motion which is absorbed in the working of the machine, and to use it as *vis viva*. He knows that every superfluous detail, every retarding influence, is at the cost of so much power, and is a mechanical defect though it may perhaps be an æsthetic beauty or a practical convenience. He may retain it because of the beauty, because of the convenience, but he knows the price of effective power at which it is obtained.

And thus it stands with Style. The first object of a writer is effective expression, the power of communicating distinct thoughts and emotional suggestions. He has to overcome the friction of ignorance and pre-occupation. He has to arrest a wandering attention, and to clear away the misconceptions which cling around verbal symbols. Words are not like iron and wood, coal and water, invariable in their properties, calculable in their effects. They are mutable in their powers, deriving force and subtle variations of force from very trifling changes of position; colouring and coloured by the words which precede and succeed; significant or insignificant from the powers of rhythm and cadence. It is the writer's art so to arrange words that they shall suffer

<sup>1</sup>The substance of this paragraph and the following one is taken directly from Spencer's essay.

the least possible retardation from the inevitable friction of the reader's mind. The analogy of a machine is perfect. In both cases the object is to secure the maximum of disposable force, by diminishing the amount absorbed in the working. Obviously, if a reader is engaged in extricating the meaning from a sentence which ought to have reflected its meaning as in a mirror, the mental energy thus employed is abstracted from the amount of force which he has to bestow on the subject; he has mentally to form anew the sentence which has been clumsily formed by the writer; he wastes, on interpretation of the symbols, force which might have been concentrated on meditation of the propositions. This waste is inappreciable in writing of ordinary excellence, and on subjects not severely tasking to the attention; but if inappreciable, it is always waste; and in bad writing, especially on topics of philosophy and science, the waste is important. And it is this which greatly narrows the circle for serious works. Interest in the subjects treated of may not be wanting; but the abundant energy is wanting which to the fatigue of consecutive thinking will add the labour of deciphering the language. Many of us are but too familiar with the fatigue of reconstructing unwieldy sentences in which the clauses are not logically dependent, nor the terms free from equivocation; we know what it is to have to hunt for the meaning hidden in a maze of words; and we can understand the yawning indifference which must soon settle upon every reader of such writing, unless

he has some strong external impulse or abundant energy.

Economy dictates that the meaning should be presented in a form which claims the least possible attention to itself as form, unless when that form is part of the writer's object, and when the simple thought is less important than the manner of presenting it. And even when the manner is playful or impassioned, the law of Economy still presides, and insists on the rejection of whatever is superfluous. Only a delicate susceptibility can discriminate a superfluity in passages of humour or rhetoric; but elsewhere a very ordinary understanding can recognise the clauses and the epithets which are out of place, and in excess, retarding or confusing the direct appreciation of the thought. If we have written a clumsy or confused sentence, we shall often find that the removal of an awkward inversion liberates the idea, or that the modification of a cadence increases the effect. This is sometimes strikingly seen at the rehearsal of a play: a passage which has fallen flat upon the ear is suddenly brightened into effectiveness by the removal of a superfluous phrase, which, by its retarding influence, had thwarted the declamatory crescendo.

Young writers may learn something of the secrets of Economy by careful revision of their own compositions, and by careful dissection of passages selected both from good and bad writers. They have simply to strike out every word, every clause, and every sentence, the removal of which will not

carry away any of the constituent elements of the thought. Having done this, let them compare the revised with the unrevised passages, and see where the excision has improved, and where it has injured, the effect. For Economy, although a primal law, is not the only law of Style. It is subject to various limitations from the pressure of other laws; and thus the removal of a trifling superfluity will not be justified by a wise economy if that loss entails a dissonance, or prevents a climax, or robs the expression of its ease and variety. Economy is rejection of whatever is superfluous; it is not Miserliness. A liberal expenditure is often the best economy, and is always so when dictated by a generous impulse, not by a prodigal carelessness or ostentatious vanity. That man would greatly err who tried to make his style effective by stripping it of all redundancy and ornament, presenting it naked before the indifferent public. Perhaps the very redundancy which he lops away might have aided the reader to see the thought more clearly, because it would have kept the thought a little longer before his mind, and thus prevented him from hurrying on to the next while this one was still imperfectly conceived.

As a general rule, redundancy is injurious; and the reason of the rule will enable us to discriminate when redundancy is injurious and when beneficial. It is injurious when it hampers the rapid movement of the reader's mind, diverting his attention to some collateral detail. But it is beneficial when its retarding influence is such as only to detain the

mind longer on the thought, and thus to secure the fuller effect of the thought. For rapid reading is often imperfect reading. The mind is satisfied with a glimpse of that which it ought to have steadily contemplated; and any artifice by which the thought can be kept long enough before the mind may indeed be a redundancy as regards the meaning, but is an economy of power. Thus we see that the phrase or the clause which we might be tempted to lop away because it threw no light upon the proposition, would be retained by a skilful writer because it added power. You may know the character of a redundancy by this one test: does it divert the attention, or simply retard it? The former is always a loss of power; the latter is sometimes a gain of power. The art of the writer consists in rejecting all redundancies that do not conduce to clearness. The shortest sentences are not necessarily the clearest. Concision gives energy, but it also adds restraint. The labour of expanding a terse sentence to its full meaning is often greater than the labour of picking out the meaning from a diffuse and loitering passage. Tacitus is more tiresome than Cicero.

There are occasions when the simplest and fewest words surpass in effect all the wealth of rhetorical amplification. An example may be seen in the passage which has been a favourite illustration from the days of Longinus<sup>1</sup> to our own. "God said: Let

<sup>1</sup> "The Sublime is an image reflected from the inward greatness of the soul. Hence it comes to pass that a naked thought without words challenges admiration and strikes by its grandeur. Such is the silence



there be light! and there was light." This is a conception of power so calm and simple that it needs only to be presented in the fewest and the plainest words, and would be confused or weakened by any suggestion of accessories. Let us amplify the expressions in the redundant style of mis-called eloquent writers: "God, in the magnificent fulness of creative energy, exclaimed: Let there be light! and lo! the agitating fiat immediately went forth, and thus in one indivisible moment the whole universe was illumined." We have here a sentence which I am certain many a writer would, in secret, prefer to the masterly plainness of Genesis. It is not a sentence which would have captivated critics.

Although this sentence from Genesis is sublime in its simplicity, we are not to conclude that simple sentences are uniformly the best, or that a style composed of propositions briefly expressed would obey a wise Economy. The reader's pleasure must not be forgotten; and he cannot be pleased by a style which always leaps and never flows. A harsh, abrupt, and dislocated manner irritates and perplexes him by its sudden jerks. It is easier to write short sentences than to read them. An easy, fluent, and harmonious phrase steals unobtrusively upon the mind, and allows

of Ajax in the 'Odyssey,' which is undoubtedly noble, and far above expression. . . . So likewise the Jewish legislator, no ordinary person, having conceived a just idea of the power of God, has nobly expressed it in the beginning of his law. 'And God said,—what?—Let there be light, and there was light. Let the earth be, and the earth was.'—Longinus, *On the Sublime*, Sect. IX., Smith's Translation.

the thought to expand quietly like an opening flower.<sup>1</sup> But the very suaveness of harmonious writing needs to be varied lest it become a drowsy monotony; and the sharp, short sentences which are intolerable when abundant, when used sparingly act like a trumpet-call to the drooping attention.

### 3. *The Law of Simplicity.*

The first obligation of Economy is that of using the fewest words to secure the fullest effect. It rejects whatever is superfluous; but the question of superfluity must, as I showed just now, be determined in each individual case by various conditions too complex and numerous to be reduced within a formula. The same may be said of Simplicity, which is indeed so intimately allied with Economy that I have only given it a separate station for purposes of convenience. The psychological basis is the same for both. The desire for simplicity is impatience at superfluity, and the impatience arises from a sense of hindrance.

*The first obligation of Simplicity is that of using the simplest means to secure the fullest effect.* But although the mind instinctively rejects all needless complexity, we shall greatly err if we fail to recognise the fact that what the mind recoils from is not the complexity, but the needlessness. When two men are set to the work of one, there is a waste of means; when two phrases are used to express one meaning twice, there is a waste

<sup>1</sup> This and the two preceding sentences are obviously intended to furnish illustrations of the styles that they describe.

of power; when incidents are multiplied and illustrations crowded without increase of illumination, there is prodigality which only the vulgar can mistake for opulence. Simplicity is a relative term. If in sketching the head of a man the artist wishes only to convey the general characteristics of that head, the fewest touches show the greatest power, selecting as they do only those details which carry with them characteristic significance. The means are simple, as the effect is simple. But if, besides the general characteristics, he wishes to convey the modelling of the forms, the play of light and shade, the textures, and the very complex effect of a human head, he must use more complex means. The simplicity which was adequate in the one case becomes totally inadequate in the other.

Obvious as this is, it has not been sufficiently present to the mind of critics who have called for plain familiar, and concrete diction, as if that alone could claim to be simple; who have demanded a style unadorned by the artifices of involution, cadence, imagery, and epigram, as if Simplicity were incompatible with these; and have praised meagreness, mistaking it for Simplicity. Saxon words are words which in their homeliness have deep-seated power, and in some places they are the simplest because the most powerful words we can employ; but their very homeliness excludes them from certain places, where their very power of suggestion is a disturbance of the general effect. The selective instinct of the artist tells him when his language should be homely, and when it

should be more elevated; and it is precisely in the imperceptible blending of the plain with the ornate that a great writer is distinguished. He uses the simplest phrases without triviality, and the grandest without a suggestion of grandiloquence.

Simplicity of Style will therefore be understood as meaning absence of needless superfluity :

“ Without o’erflowing full.”<sup>1</sup>

Its plainness is never meagreness, but unity. Obedient to the primary impulse of *adequate* expression, the style of a complex subject should be complex; of a technical subject, technical; of an abstract subject, abstract; of a familiar subject, familiar; of a pictorial subject, picturesque. The structure of the *Antigone* is simple; but so also is the structure of *Othello*, though it contains many more elements; the simplicity of both lies in their fulness without superfluity.

Whatever is outside the purpose, or the feeling, of a scene, a speech, a sentence, or a phrase, whatever may be omitted without sacrifice of effect, is a sin against this law. I do not say that the incident, description, or dialogue, which may be omitted without injury to the unity of the work, is necessarily a sin against art; still less that, even when acknowledged as a sin, it may not sometimes be condoned by its success. The law of Simplicity is not the only law of

<sup>1</sup> Address to the Thames, in Denham’s “Cooper’s Hill”—

“ O could I flow like thee, and make thy stream  
My great example, as it is my theme!  
Though deep yet clear; though gentle yet not dull;  
Strong without rage, without o’erflowing full.”

art; and, moreover, audiences are, unhappily, so little accustomed to judge works as wholes, and so ready to seize upon any detail which pleases them, no matter how incongruously the detail may be placed,<sup>1</sup> that a felicitous fault will captivate applause, let critics shake reproving heads as they may. Nevertheless the law of Simplicity remains unshaken, and ought only to give way to the pressure of the law of Variety.

The drama offers a good opportunity for studying the operation of this law, because the limitations of time compel the dramatist to attend closely to what is and what is not needful for his purpose. A drama must compress into two or three hours material which may be diffused through three volumes of a novel, because spectators are more impatient than readers, and more unequivocally resent by their signs of weariness any disregard of economy, which in the novel may be skipped. The dramatist having little time in which to evolve his story, feels that every scene which does not forward the progress of the action or intensify the interest in the characters is an artistic defect; though in itself it may be charmingly written, and may excite applause, it is away from his immediate purpose. And what is true of purposeless scenes and characters which divert the current of progress, is equally true, in a minor degree, of speeches and sentences which arrest the culminating interest by calling

<sup>1</sup> "Was hilft's, wenn ihr ein Ganzes dargebracht?  
Das Publikum wird es euch doch zerpfücken."

(Goethe.)—G. H. L.

"Faust," *Vorspiel auf dem Theater*, ll. 102-103.

attention away to other objects. It is an error which arises from a deficient earnestness on the writer's part, or from a too pliant facility. The *dramatis personæ* wander in their dialogue, not swayed by the fluctuations of feeling, but by the author's desire to show his wit and wisdom, or else by his want of power to control the vagrant suggestions of his fancy. The desire for display and the inability to control are weaknesses that lead to almost every transgression of Simplicity; but sometimes the transgressions are made in more or less conscious obedience to the law of Variety, although the highest reach of art is to secure variety by an opulent simplicity.

The novelist is not under the same limitations of time, nor has he to contend against the same mental impatience on the part of his public. He may therefore linger where the dramatist must hurry; he may digress, and gain fresh impetus from the digression, where the dramatist would seriously endanger the effect of his scene by retarding its evolution. The novelist with a prudent prodigality may employ descriptions, dialogues, and episodes which would be fatal in a drama. Characters may be introduced and dismissed without having any important connection with the plot; it is enough if they serve the purpose of the chapter in which they appear. Although as a matter of fine art no character should have a place in a novel unless it form an integral element of the story, and no episode should be introduced unless it reflects some strong light on the characters or incidents, this is a critical demand which only fine

artists think of satisfying, and only delicate tastes appreciate. For the mass of readers it is enough if they are amused; and indeed all readers, no matter how critical their taste, would rather be pleased by a transgression of the law than wearied by prescription. Delight condones offence. The only question for the writer is, whether the offence is so trivial as to be submerged in the delight. And he will do well to remember that the greater flexibility belonging to the novel by no means removes the novel from the laws which rule the drama. The parts of a novel should have organic relations. Push the licence to excess, and stitch together a volume of unrelated chapters—a patchwork of descriptions, dialogues, and incidents,—no one will call that a novel; and the less the work has of this unorganised character the greater will be its value, not only in the eyes of critics, but in its effect on the emotions of the reader.

Simplicity of structure means organic unity, whether the organism be simple or complex; and hence in all times the emphasis which critics have laid upon Simplicity, though they have not unfrequently confounded it with narrowness of range. In like manner, as we said just now, when treating of diction they have overlooked the fact that the simplest must be that which best expresses the thought. Simplicity of diction is integrity of speech; that which admits of least equivocation, that which by the clearest verbal symbols most readily calls up in the reader's mind the images and feelings which

the writer wishes to call up. Such diction may be concrete or abstract, familiar or technical; its simplicity is determined by the nature of the thought. We shall often be simpler in using abstract and technical terms than in using concrete and familiar terms which by their very concreteness and familiarity call up images and feelings foreign to our immediate purpose. If we desire the attention to fall upon some general idea we only blur its outlines by using words that call up particulars. Thus, although it may be needful to give some definite direction to the reader's thoughts by the suggestion of a particular fact, we must be careful not to arrest his attention on the fact itself, still less to divert it by calling up vivid images of facts unrelated to our present purpose. For example, I wish to fix in the reader's mind a conception of a lonely, meditative man walking on the sea-shore, and I fall into the vicious style of our day which is lauded as word-painting, and write something like this:—

“The fishermen mending their storm-beaten boats upon the shore would lay down the hammer to gaze after him as he passed abstractedly before their huts, his hair streaming in the salt breeze, his feet crushing the scattered seaweed, his eyes dreamily fixed upon the purple heights of the precipitous crags.”

Now it is obvious that the details here assembled are mostly foreign to my purpose, which has nothing whatever to do with fishermen, storms, boats, seaweeds, or purple crags; and by calling up images of these I only divert the attention from my thought.



Whereas, if it had been my purpose to picture the scene itself, or the man's delight in it, then the enumeration of details would give colour and distinctness to the picture.

The art of a great writer is seen in the perfect fitness of his expressions. He knows how to blend vividness with vagueness, knows where images are needed, and where by their vivacity they would be obstacles to the rapid appreciation of his thought. The value of concrete illustration artfully used may be seen illustrated in a passage from Macaulay's invective against Frederic the Great: "On the head of Frederic is all the blood which was shed in a war which raged during many years and in every quarter of the globe, the blood of the column at Fontenoy, the blood of the mountaineers who were slaughtered at Culloden. The evils produced by his wickedness were felt in lands where the name of Prussia was unknown; and in order that he might rob a neighbour whom he had promised to defend, black men fought on the coast of Coromandel, and red men scalped each other by the Great Lakes of North America."<sup>1</sup> Disregarding the justice or injustice of the thought, note the singular force and beauty of this passage, delightful alike to ear and mind; and observe how its very elaborateness has the effect of the finest simplicity, because the successive pictures are constituents of the general thought, and by their vividness render the conclusion more impressive. Let us suppose him to have written with the vague generality

<sup>1</sup> Essay on "Frederic the Great."

of expression much patronised by dignified historians, and told us that "Frederic was the cause of great European conflicts extending over long periods; and in consequence of his political aggression hideous crimes were perpetrated in the most distant parts of the globe." This absence of concrete images would not have been simplicity, inasmuch as the labour of converting the general expressions into definite meanings would thus have been thrown upon the reader.

Pictorial illustration has its dangers, as we daily see in the clumsy imitators of Macaulay, who have not the fine instinct of style, but obey the vulgar instinct of display, and imagine they can produce a brilliant effect by the use of strong lights, whereas they distract the attention with images alien to the general impression, just as crude colourists vex the eye with importunate splendours. Nay, even good writers sometimes sacrifice the large effect of a diffusive light to the small effect of a brilliant point. This is a defect of taste frequently noticeable in two very good writers, De Quincey and Ruskin, whose command of expression is so varied that it tempts them into *fioritura* as flexibility of voice tempts singers to sin against simplicity. At the close of an eloquent passage De Quincey writes:—

"Gravitation, again, that works without holiday for ever, and searches every corner of the universe, what intellect can follow it to its fountain? And yet, shyer than gravitation, less to be counted than the fluxions of sun-dials, stealthier than the growth

of a forest, are the footsteps of Christianity amongst the political workings of man."<sup>1</sup>

The association of holidays and shyness with an idea so abstract as that of gravitation, the use of the learned word fluxions to express the movements of the shadows on a dial, and the discordant suggestion of stealthiness applied to vegetable growth and Christianity, are so many offences against simplicity. Let the passage be contrasted with one in which wealth of imagery is in accordance with the thought it expresses:—

"In the edifices of Man there should be found reverent worship and following, not only of the spirit which rounds the pillars of the forest, and arches the vault of the avenue—which gives veining to the leaf and polish to the shell, and grace to every pulse that agitates animal organisation—but of that also which reproves the pillars of the earth, and builds up her barren precipices into the coldness of the clouds, and lifts her shadowy cones of mountain purple into the pale arch of the sky; for these, and other glories more than these, refuse not to connect themselves, in his thoughts, with the work of his own hand; the grey cliff loses not its nobleness when it reminds us of some Cyclopean waste of mural stone; the pinnacles of the rocky promontory arrange themselves, undegraded, into fantastic semblances of fortress towers, and even the awful cone of the far-off mountain has a melancholy mixed with that of its own solitude, which is cast from

<sup>1</sup> "On Christianity as an Organ of Political Movement," *Works*, vol. xi. p. 234.

the images of nameless tumuli on white sea-shores, and of the heaps of reedy clay, into which chambered cities melt in their mortality."<sup>1</sup>

I shall notice but two points in this singularly beautiful passage. The one is the exquisite instinct of Sequence in several of the phrases, not only as to harmony, but as to the evolution of the meaning, especially in "builds up her barren precipices into the coldness of the clouds, and lifts her shadowy cones of mountain purple into the pale arch of the sky." The other is the injurious effect of three words in the sentence, "*refuse not to connect themselves in his thoughts.*" Strike out the words printed in italics, and you not only improve the harmony, but free the sentence from a disturbing use of what Ruskin has named the "pathetic fallacy." There are times in which Nature may be assumed as in sympathy with our moods; and at such times the pathetic fallacy is a source of subtle effect. But in the passage just quoted the introduction seems to me a mistake: the simplicity of the thought is disturbed by this hint of an active participation of Nature in man's feelings; it is preserved in its integrity by the omission of that hint.

These illustrations will suffice to show how the law we are considering will command and forbid the use of concrete expressions and vivid imagery according to the purpose of the writer. A fine taste guided by Sincerity will determine that use. Nothing more than a general rule can be laid down. Eloquence, as I said

<sup>1</sup> Ruskin, *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, Chap. III., p. 72.

before, cannot spring from the simple desire to be eloquent; the desire usually leads to grandiloquence. But Sincerity will save us. We have but to remember Montesquieu's advice: "*Il faut prendre garde aux grandes phrases dans les humbles sujets; elles produisent l'effet d'une masque á barbe blanche sur la joue d'un enfant.*"

Here another warning may be placed. In our anxiety, lest we err on the side of grandiloquence, we may perhaps fall into the opposite error of tameness. Sincerity will save us here also. Let us but express the thought and feeling actually in our minds, then our very grandiloquence (if that is our weakness) will have a certain movement and vivacity not without effect, and our tameness (if we are tame) will have a gentleness not without its charm.

Finally, let us banish from our critical superstitions the notion that chastity of composition, or simplicity of Style, is in any respect allied to timidity. There are two kinds of timidity, or rather it has two different origins, both of which cripple the free movement of thought. The one is the timidity of fastidiousness, the other of placid stupidity: the one shrinks from originality lest it should be regarded as impertinent; the other lest, being new, it should be wrong. We detect the one in the sensitive discreteness of the style. We detect the other in the complacency of its platitudes and the stereotyped commonness of its metaphors. The writer who is afraid of originality feels himself in deep water when he launches into a commonplace. For him who is timid because weak, there is no advice, except suggesting the propriety of silence.

For him who is timid because fastidious, there is this advice : get rid of the superstition about chastity, and recognise the truth that a style may be simple, even if it move among abstractions, or employ few Saxon words, or abound in concrete images and novel turns of expression.

#### 4. *The Law of Sequence.*

Much that might be included under this head would equally well find its place under that of Economy or that of Climax. Indeed it is obvious that to secure perfect Economy there must be that sequence of the words which will present the least obstacle to the unfolding of the thought, and that Climax is only attainable through a properly graduated sequence. But there is another element we have to take into account, and that is the rhythmical effect of Style. Mr. Herbert Spencer in his essay very clearly states the law of Sequence, but I infer that he would include it entirely under the law of Economy ; at any rate he treats of it solely in reference to intelligibility, and not at all in its scarcely less important relation to harmony. "We have *a priori* reasons," he says, "for believing that in every sentence there is some one order of words more effective than any other ; and that this order is the one which presents the elements of the proposition in the succession in which they may be most readily put together. As in a narrative, the events should be stated in such sequence that the mind may not have to go backwards and forwards in order to rightly connect them ; as in a group of sentences, the arrange-

ment should be such that each of them may be understood when it comes, without waiting for subsequent ones; so in every sentence, the sequence of words should be that which suggests the constituents of the thought in the order most convenient for the building up that thought."

But Style appeals to the emotions as well as to the intellect, and the arrangement of words and sentences which will be the most economical may not be the most musical, and the most musical may not be the most pleasurably effective. For Climax and Variety it may be necessary to sacrifice something of rapid intelligibility: hence involutions, antitheses, and suspensions, which disturb the most orderly arrangement, may yet, in virtue of their own subtle influences, be counted as improvements on that arrangement.

Tested by the Intellect and the Feelings, the law of Sequence is seen to be a curious compound of the two. If we isolate these elements for the purposes of exposition, we shall find that the principle of the first is much simpler and more easy of obedience than the principle of the second. It may be thus stated:—

*The constituent elements of the conception expressed in the sentence and the paragraph should be arranged in strict correspondence with an inductive or a deductive progression.*

All exposition, like all research, is either inductive or deductive. It groups particulars so as to lead up to a general conception which embraces them all, but which could not be fully understood until they had been estimated; or else it starts from some general

conception, already familiar to the mind, and as it moves along, casts its light upon numerous particulars, which are thus shown to be related to it, but which without that light would have been overlooked.

If the reader will meditate on that brief statement of the principle, he will, I think, find it explain many doubtful points. Let me merely notice one, namely, the dispute as to whether the direct or the indirect style should be preferred. Some writers insist, and others practise the precept without insistence, that the proposition should be stated first, and all its qualifications as well as its evidences be made to follow; others maintain that the proposition should be made to grow up step by step with all its evidences and qualifications in their due order, and the conclusion disclose itself as crowning the whole. Are not both methods right under different circumstances? If my object is to convince you of a general truth, or to impress you with a feeling, which you are not already prepared to accept, it is obvious that the most effective method is the inductive, which leads your mind upon a culminating wave of evidence or emotion to the very point I aim at. But the deductive method is best when I wish to direct the light of familiar truths and roused emotions, upon new particulars, or upon details in unsuspected relation to those truths; and when I wish the attention to be absorbed by these particulars which are of interest in themselves, not upon the general truths which are of no present interest except in as far as they light up these details. A growing thought requires



the inductive exposition, an applied thought the deductive.

This principle, which is of very wide application, is subject to two important qualifications—one pressed on it by the necessities of Climax and Variety, the other by the feebleness of memory, which cannot keep a long hold of details unless their significance is apprehended; so that a paragraph of suspended meaning should never be long, and when the necessities of the case bring together numerous particulars in evidence of the conclusion, they should be so arranged as to have culminating force: one clause leading up to another, and throwing its impetus into it, instead of being linked on to another, and dragging the mind down with its weight.

It is surprising how few men understand that Style is a Fine Art; and how few of those who are fastidious in their diction give much care to the arrangement of their sentences, paragraphs, and chapters—in a word, to Composition. The painter distributes his masses with a view to general effect; so does the musician: writers seldom do so. Nor do they usually arrange the members of their sentences in that sequence which shall secure for each its proper emphasis and its determining influence on the others—influence reflected back and influence projected forward. As an example of the charm that lies in unostentatious antiphony, consider this passage from Ruskin:—"Originality in expression does not depend on invention of new words; nor originality in poetry on invention of new measures; nor in painting on

invention of new colours or new modes of using them. The chords of music, the harmonies of colour, the general principles of the arrangement of sculptural masses, have been determined long ago, and in all probability cannot be added to any more than they can be altered." Men write like this by instinct; and I by no means wish to suggest that writing like this can be produced by rule. What I suggest is, that in this, as in every other Fine Art, instinct does mostly find itself in accordance with rule; and a knowledge of rules helps to direct the blind gropings of feeling, and to correct the occasional mistakes of instinct. If, after working his way through a long and involved sentence in which the meaning is rough hewn, the writer were to try its effect upon ear and intellect, he might see its defects and re-shape it into beauty and clearness. But in general men shirk this labour, partly because it is irksome, and partly because they have no distinct conception of the rules which would make the labour light.

The law of Sequence, we have seen, rests upon the two requisites of Clearness and Harmony. Men with a delicate sense of rhythm will instinctively distribute their phrases in an order that falls agreeably on the ear, without monotony, and without an echo of other voices; and men with a keen sense of logical relation will instinctively arrange their sentences in an order that best unfolds the meaning. The French are great masters of the law of Sequence, and, did space permit, I could cite many excellent examples. One brief passage from Royer Collard must suffice:—"Les faits

que l'observation laisse épars et muets la causalité les rassemble, les enchaîne, leur prête un langage. Chaque fait révèle celui qui a précédé, prophétise celui qui va suivre."

The ear is only a guide to the harmony of a period, and often tempts us into the feebleness of expletives or approximate expressions for the sake of a cadence. Yet, on the other hand, if we disregard the subtle influences of harmonious arrangement, our thoughts lose much of the force which would otherwise result from their logical subordination. The easy evolution of thought in a melodious period, quietly taking up on its way a variety of incidental details, yet never lingering long enough over them to divert the attention or to suspend the continuous crescendo of interest, but by subtle influences of proportion allowing each clause of the sentence its separate significance, is the product of a natural gift, as rare as the gift of music, or of poetry.<sup>1</sup> But until men come to understand that Style is an art, and an amazingly difficult art, they will continue with careless presumption to tumble out their sentences as they would tilt stones from a cart, trusting very much to accident or gravitation for the shapeliness of the result. I will write a passage which may serve as an example of what I mean, although the defect is purposely kept within very ordinary limits:—

"To construct a sentence with many loosely and not obviously dependent clauses, each clause contain-

<sup>1</sup> The sentence is, and was doubtless intended to be, an illustration of the principle.

ing an important meaning or a concrete image the vivacity of which, like a boulder in a shallow stream, disturbs the equable current of thought,—and in such a case the more beautiful the image the greater the obstacle, so that the laws of simplicity and economy are violated by it,—while each clause really requires for its interpretation a proposition that is however kept suspended till the close,—is a defect."

The weariness produced by such writing as this is very great, and yet the recasting of the passage is easy. Thus:—

"It is a defect when a sentence is constructed with many loosely and not obviously dependent clauses, each of which requires for its interpretation a proposition that is kept suspended till the close; and this defect is exaggerated when each clause contains an important meaning, or a concrete image which, like a boulder in a shallow stream, disturbs the equable current of thought: the more beautiful the image, the greater its violation of the laws of simplicity and economy."

In this second form the sentence has no long suspension of the main idea, no diversions of the current. The proposition is stated and illustrated directly, and the mind of the reader follows that of the writer. How injurious it is to keep the key in your pocket until all the locks in succession have been displayed may be seen in such a sentence as this:—

"Phantoms of lost power, sudden intuitions, and shadowy restorations of forgotten feelings, sometimes

dim and perplexing, sometimes by bright but furtive glimpses, sometimes by a full and steady revelation overcharged with light—throw us back in a moment upon scenes and remembrances that we have left full thirty years behind us.”<sup>1</sup>

Had De Quincey liberated our minds from suspense by first presenting the thought which first arose in his own mind—namely, that we are thrown back upon scenes and remembrances by phantoms of lost power, etc.,—the beauty of his language in its pregnant suggestiveness would have been felt at once. Instead of that, he makes us accompany him in darkness, and when the light appears we have to travel backward over the ground again to see what we have passed. The passage continues:—

“In solitude, and chiefly in the solitudes of nature, and, above all, amongst the great and enduring features of nature, such as mountains and quiet dells, and the lawny recesses of forests, and the silent shores of lakes, features with which (as being themselves less liable to change) our feelings, have a more abiding association.—under these circumstances it is, that such evanescent hauntings of our past and forgotten selves are more apt to startle and to waylay us.”

The beauty of this passage seems to me marred by the awkward yet necessary interruption, “under these circumstances it is,” which would have been avoided by opening the sentence with “such evanescent hauntings of our forgotten selves are most apt

<sup>1</sup> De Quincey, *Literary Reminiscences*, Chap. VIII.

to startle us in solitudes," etc. . Compare the effect of directness in the following :—

"This was one, and the most common shape of extinguished power, from which Coleridge fled to the great city. But sometimes the same decay came back upon his heart in the more poignant shape of intimations, and vanishing glimpses, recovered for one moment from the paradise of youth, and from the fields of joy and power, over which for him, too certainly, he felt that the cloud of night had settled for ever."

Obedience to the law of Sequence gives strength by giving clearness and beauty of rhythm; it economises force and creates music. A very trifling disregard of it will mar an effect. See an example both of obedience and trifling disobedience in the following passage from Ruskin :—

"People speak in this working age, when they speak from their hearts, as if houses and lands, and food and raiment were alone useful, and as if Sight, Thought, and Admiration were all profitless, so that men insolently call themselves Utilitarians, who would turn, if they had their way, themselves and their race into vegetables; men who think, as far as such can be said to think, that the meat is more than the life and the raiment than the body, who look to the earth as a stable and to its fruit as fodder; vinedressers and husbandmen, who love the corn they grind, and the grapes they crush, better than the gardens of the angels upon the slopes of Eden."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Painters*, II., Sect. I, Chap. i., p. 4.

It is instructive to contrast the dislocated sentence, "who would turn, if they had their way, themselves and their race," with the sentence which succeeds it, "men who think, as far as such can be said to think, that the meat," etc. In the latter the parenthetic interruption is a source of power; it dams the current to increase its force: in the former the inversion is a loss of power; it is a dissonance to the ear and a diversion of the thought.

As illustrations of Sequence in composition, two passages may be quoted from Macaulay which display the power of pictorial suggestions when, instead of diverting attention from the main purpose, they are arranged with progressive and culminating effect.

"Such or nearly such was the change which passed on the Mogul empire during the forty years which followed the death of Aurungzebe. A succession of nominal sovereigns, sunk in indolence and debauchery, sauntered away life in secluded palaces, chewing bang, fondling concubines, and listening to buffoons. A succession of ferocious invaders descended through the western passes, to prey on the defenceless wealth of Hindostan. A Persian conqueror crossed the Indus, marched through the gates of Delhi, and bore away in triumph those treasures, of which the magnificence had astounded Roe and Bernier, the Peacock Throne, on which the richest jewels of Golconda had been disposed by the most skilful hands of Europe, and the inestimable Mountain of Light, which, after many strange vicissitudes, lately shone in the bracelet of

Runjeet Sing, and is now destined to adorn the hideous idol of Orissa. The Afghan soon followed to complete the work of devastation, which the Persian had begun. The warlike tribes of Rajpootana threw off the Mussulman yoke. A band of mercenary soldiers occupied Rohilcund. The Seiks ruled on the Indus. The Jauts spread dismay along the Jumnah. The high lands which border on the western sea-coast of India poured forth a yet more formidable race, a race which was long the terror of every native power, and which, after many desperate and doubtful struggles, yielded only to the fortune and genius of England. It was under the reign of Aurungzebe that this wild clan of plunderers first descended from their mountains; and soon after his death, every corner of his wide empire learned to tremble at the mighty name of the Mahrattas. Many fertile viceroyalties were entirely subdued by them. Their dominions stretched across the peninsula from sea to sea. Mahratta captains reigned at Poónah, at Gualior, in Guzerat, in Berar, and in Tanjore."<sup>1</sup>

Such prose as this affects us like poetry. The pictures and suggestions might possibly have been gathered together by any other historian; but the artful succession, the perfect sequence, could only have been found by a fine writer. I pass over a few paragraphs, and pause at this second example of a sentence simple in structure, though complex in its elements, sed but not overfed with material, and

<sup>1</sup> *Lord Clive, Authorised Edition, p. 302.*



almost perfect in its cadence and logical connection. "Scarcely any man, however sagacious, would have thought it possible that a trading company, separated from India by fifteen thousand miles of sea, and possessing in India only a few acres for purposes of commerce, would, in less than a hundred years, spread its empire from Cape Comorin to the eternal snow of the Himalayas; would compel Mahratta and Mahomedan to forget their mutual feuds in common subjection; would tame down even those wild races which had resisted the most powerful of the Moguls; and having united under its laws a hundred millions of subjects, would carry its victorious arms far to the east of the Burrampooter, and far to the west of the Hydaspes, dictate terms of peace at the gates of Ava, and seat its vassal on the throne of Candahar."

Let us see the same principle exhibited in a passage at once pictorial and argumentative. "We know more certainly every day," says Ruskin, "that whatever appears to us harmful in the universe has some beneficent or necessary operation; that the storm which destroys a harvest brightens the sun-beams for harvests yet unsown, and that the volcano which buries a city preserves a thousand from destruction. But the evil is not for the time less fearful, because we have learned it to be necessary; and we easily understand the timidity of the tenderness of the spirit which would withdraw itself from the presence of destruction, and create in its imagination a world of which the peace should be unbroken, in which the sky should not darken nor the sea rage,

in which the leaf should not change nor the blossom wither. That man is greater, however, who contemplates with an equal mind the alternations of terror and of beauty; who, not rejoicing less beneath the sunny sky, can bear also to watch the bars of twilight narrowing on the horizon; and, not less sensible to the blessing of the peace of nature, can rejoice in the magnificence of the ordinances by which that peace is protected and secured. But separated from both by an immeasurable distance would be the man who delighted in convulsion and disease for their own sake; who found his daily food in the disorder of nature mingled with the suffering of humanity; and watched joyfully at the right hand of the Angel whose appointed work is to destroy as well as to accuse, while the corners of the house of feasting were struck by the wind from the wilderness."<sup>1</sup>

I will now cite a passage from Burke, which will seem tame after the pictorial animation of the passages from Macaulay and Ruskin; but which, because it is simply an exposition of opinions addressed to the understanding, will excellently illustrate the principle I am enforcing. He is treating of the dethronement of kings. "As it was not made for common abuses, so it is not to be agitated by common minds. The speculative line of demarcation, where obedience ought to end, and resistance must begin, is faint, obscure, and not easily definable. It is not a single act, or a single event, which deter-

<sup>1</sup> *Stories of Venice*, II., chap. vi. p. 100.

mines it. Governments must be abused and deranged indeed, before it can be thought of; and the prospect of the future must be as bad as the experience of the past. When things are in that lamentable condition, the nature of the disease is to indicate the remedy to those whom nature has qualified to administer in extremities this critical, ambiguous, bitter potion to a distempered state. Times, and occasions, and provocations, will teach their own lessons. The wise will determine from the gravity of the case; the irritable from sensibility to oppression; the high-minded from disdain and indignation at abusive power in unworthy hands; the brave and bold from the love of honourable danger in a generous cause: but, with or without right, a revolution will be the very last resource of the thinking and the good."<sup>1</sup>

As a final example I will cite a passage from M. Taine:—"De là encore cette insolence contre les inférieurs, et ce mépris versé d'étage en étage depuis le premier jusqu'au dernier. Lorsque dans une société la loi consacre les conditions inégales, personne n'est exempt d'insulte; le grand seigneur, outragé par le roi, outrage le noble qui outrage le peuple; la nature humaine est humiliée à tous les étages, et la société n'est plus qu'un commerce d'affronts."

The law of Sequence by no means prescribes that we should invariably state the proposition before its qualifications—the thought before its illustrations; it

<sup>1</sup> "Reflections on the Revolution in France," *Works*, vol. ii. p. 304.

merely prescribes that we should arrange our phrases in the order of logical dependence and rhythmical cadence, the order best suited for clearness and for harmony. The nature of the thought will determine the one, our sense of euphony the other.

### 5. *The Law of Climax.*

We need not pause long over this; it is generally understood. The condition of our sensibilities is such that to produce their effect stimulants must be progressive in intensity and varied in kind. On this condition rest the laws of Climax and Variety. The phrase or image which in one position will have a mild power of occupying the thoughts, or stimulating the emotions, loses this power if made to succeed one of like kind but more agitating influence, and will gain an accession of power if it be artfully placed on the wave of a climax. We laugh at

"Then came Dalhousie, that great God of War,  
Lieutenant-Colonel to the Earl of Mar,"

because of the relaxation which follows the sudden tension of the mind; but if we remove the idea of the colonelcy from this position of anti-climax, the same couplet becomes energetic rather than ludicrous:—

"Lieutenant-Colonel to the Earl of Mar,  
Then came Dalhousie, that great God of War."

I have selected this strongly marked case, instead of several feeble passages which might be chosen from the first book at hand, wherein carelessness allows

the sentences to close with the least important phrases, and the style droops under frequent anticlimax. Let me now cite a passage from Macaulay which vividly illustrates the effect of Climax:—

“Never, perhaps, was the change which the progress of civilisation has produced in the art of war more strikingly illustrated than on that day. Ajax beating down the Trojan leader with a rock which two ordinary men could scarcely lift, Horatius defending the bridge against an army, Richard, the Lion-hearted, spurring along the whole Saracen line without finding an enemy to withstand his assault, Robert Bruce crushing with one blow the helmet and head of Sir Henry Bohun in sight of the whole array of England and Scotland, such are the heroes of a dark age. [Here is an example of suspended meaning, where the suspense intensifies the effect, because each particular is vividly apprehended in itself, and all culminate in the conclusion; they do not complicate the thought, or puzzle us, they only heighten expectation.] In such an age, bodily vigour is the most indispensable qualification of a warrior. At Landen two poor sickly beings, who, in a rude state of society, would have been regarded as too puny to bear any part in combats, were the souls of two great armies. In some heathen countries they would have been exposed while infants. In Christendom they would, six hundred years earlier, have been sent to some quiet cloister. But their lot had fallen on a time when men had discovered that the strength of the muscles is far inferior in value to the strength of

the mind. It is probable that, among the hundred and twenty thousand soldiers who were marshalled round Neerwinden under all the standards of Western Europe, the two feeblest in body were the hunch-backed dwarf, who urged forward the fiery onset of France, and the asthmatic skeleton who covered the slow retreat of England."<sup>1</sup>

The effect of Climax is very marked in the drama. Every speech, every scene, every act, should have its progressive sequence. Nothing can be more injudicious than a trivial phrase following an energetic phrase, a feeble thought succeeding a burst of passion, or even a passionate thought succeeding one more passionate. Yet this error is frequently committed.

In the drama all laws of Style are more imperious than in fiction or prose of any kind, because the art is more intense. But Climax is demanded in every species of composition, for it springs from a psychological necessity. It is pressed upon, however, by the law of Variety in a way to make it far from safe to be too rigidly followed. It easily degenerates into monotony.

#### 6. *The Law of Variety.*

Some one, after detailing an elaborate recipe for a salad, wound up the enumeration of ingredients and quantities with the advice to "open the window and throw it all away." This advice might be applied to the foregoing enumeration of the laws of Style, unless these were supplemented by the

<sup>1</sup> *History of England*, Chap. XX.

important law of Variety. A style which rigidly interpreted the precepts of economy, simplicity, sequence, and climax, which rejected all superfluous words and redundant ornaments, adopted the easiest and most logical arrangement, and closed every sentence and every paragraph with a climax, might be a very perfect bit of mosaic, but would want the glow and movement of a living mind. Monotony would settle on it like a paralysing frost. A series of sentences in which every phrase was a distinct thought, would no more serve as pabulum for the mind, than portable soup freed from all the fibrous tissues of meat and vegetable would serve as food for the body. Animals perish from hunger in the presence of pure albumen; and minds would lapse into idiocy in the presence of unadulterated thought.<sup>1</sup> But without invoking extreme cases, let us simply remember the psychological fact that it is as easy for sentences to be too compact as for food to be too concentrated; and that many a happy negligence, which to microscopic criticism may appear defective, will be the means of giving clearness and grace to a style. Of course the indolent indulgence in this laxity robs style of all grace and power. But monotony in the structure of sentences, monotony of cadence, monotony of climax, monotony anywhere, necessarily defeats the very aim and end of style; it calls attention to the manner; it blunts the sensibilities; it renders excellencies odious.

"Beauty deprived of its proper foils and adjuncts

<sup>1</sup> Cf. De Quincey's essay on "Style," Part I.

ceases to be enjoyed as beauty, just as light deprived of all shadow ceases to be enjoyed as light. A white canvas cannot produce an effect of sunshine; the painter must darken it in some places before he can make it look luminous in others; nor can an uninterrupted succession of beauty produce the true effect of beauty; it must be soiled by inferiority before its own power can be developed. Nature has for the most part mingled her inferior and noble elements as she mingles sunshine with shade, giving due use and influence to both, and the painter who chooses to remove the shadow, perishes in the burning desert he has created. The truly high and beautiful art of Angelico is continually refreshed and strengthened by his frank portraiture of the most ordinary features of his brother monks and of the recorded peculiarities of ungainly sanctity; but the modern German and Raphaellesque schools lose all honour and nobleness in barber-like admiration of handsome faces, and have, in fact, no real faith except in straight noses, and curled hair. Paul Veronese opposes the dwarf to the soldier, and the negress to the queen; Shakespeare places Caliban beside Miranda, and Autolycus beside Perdita; but the vulgar idealist withdraws his beauty to the safety of the saloon, and his innocence to the seclusion of the cloister; he pretends that he does this in delicacy of choice and purity of sentiment, while in truth he has neither courage to front the monster, nor wit enough to furnish the knave."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, III., chap. iii. p. 34.



And how is Variety to be secured? The plan is simple, but, like many other simple plans, is not without difficulty. It is for the writer to obey the great cardinal principle of Sincerity, and be brave enough to express himself in his own way, following the moods of his own mind, rather than endeavouring to catch the accents of another, or to adapt himself to some standard of taste. No man really thinks and feels monotonously. If he is monotonous in his manner of setting forth his thoughts and feelings, that is either because he has not learned the art of writing, or because he is more or less consciously imitating the manner of others. The subtle play of thought will give movement and life to his style if he do not clog it with critical superstitions. I do not say that it will give him grace and power; I do not say that relying on perfect sincerity will make him a fine writer, because sincerity will not give talent; but I say that sincerity will give him 'all the power that is possible to him, and will secure him the inestimable excellence of Variety.

THE INNER LIFE OF ART.

*Except in the cases specially marked [Ed.] the  
Notes appended to the following Essay are by  
Leaves himself.*

## THE INNER LIFE OF ART.

IT is a mistake to assert, as is so often heedlessly done, that the English have no system of aesthetics—no genuine philosophy of art—a serious mistake, implying reflections on our “commercial character” which amount to insult. We have a system; a definite, tangible, perfectly practical one; and it lies written in the weighty volumes of Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, MacCulloch’s *Commercial Dictionary*, and De Morgan’s *On the Differential Calculus*. Art may not with us be a “revelation of the Infinite,” but it is a very positive branch of *trade*, and subject to all the fluctuations of market and fashion, in common with every other produce of refined civilisation. Our age is a practical—our country a commercial one. A book is not usually published to give utterance to some mighty and carefully elaborated truth, but “in consequence of the demand.” Great authors are no longer looked upon as priests of the social life, speaking from the foot of their respective altars the winged words of a divine mission, but as “popular and admired writers,” whose names ensure a ready demand from circulating libraries and book-clubs. No poetic

mania, no *μᾶλα δεῦν*) (such as Aristophanes attributes to Æschylus, unable otherwise to account for his golden verses), is now, except in obscurest corners, supposed necessary for the production of immortal works—but a refined calculation and comprehensive survey of the “state of the market.” The *callida junctura* (skilful arrangement) which Horace recommends has taken the place of the real art—*calida junctura*, or impassioned conjunction. How far this commercial theory may be true we know not; at the same time we are happy in the knowledge that such is not the universal belief, that other nations regard Art as something far transcending any commerce yet invented, and that many even here in Britain share the same opinion; to these then we address ourselves in the hope of calling their attention to the æsthetical systems of German philosophers, and so let an examination and comparison of them with their own take place, which may not be fruitless in disseminating truer notions amongst our artists.

To those who regard Art as something higher than works “done to order,” and as requiring for its production higher endowments than persevering industry and cunning imitation of rules and examples, and to those artists who study the works of their predecessors, not to steal materials with which to build up their own mosaic rickety productions, but to catch some reflection of the light which shone in them, and with it to learn to read the deeper mysteries and meanings of nature, to sit under the sun of genius and watch with reverent eyes the direction

of its beams, piercing with them into unexplored, undreamt-of regions, and then returning to utter the glad tidings to the world—in a word, to the *Artist*, as opposed to the *Artisan*, the present state of criticism in England must needs be an unsatisfactory object of contemplation. The poet whose life has been distilled into his work, who in obeying the ever-moving impulse from within, has laboriously chosen, arranged and fused his materials, so that a coherent whole arises from the smouldering ashes of his sufferings, finds in criticism no sympathising, reverent, and affectionate sister, who will assiduously fetch out the latent meaning, and irradiate, with her understanding, those more dim and intense feelings of his imagination which may have found expression in unusual forms. Of what avail are years of toil? why waste time upon your art when it will not be recognised, and when a few “quotable passages” and showy descriptions will be sure to “tell” better? This is what the artist may be tempted in his despair to ask himself. There are some critics indeed who put forth deep and comprehensive views, evincing a perfect appreciation and knowledge of the aim and means of art, but they might easily be numbered; for indeed what Goethe calls “Sinn für ein ästhetisches Ganzes,” is given but to few.

But let us turn our eyes to France or Germany, and see what a different state of things presents itself. We cannot take up the merest three-halfpenny journal without being struck with the different spirit animating it: whatever may be the extent of the

critic's vision, he looks out from a higher point of view, and speaks from ascertained principles. Such being the facts of the case, let us show how imperative it is in us to seek an outlet from our own "cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd" sphere into the great world of æsthetics. An unmistakable tendency towards it is to be read in various quarters. Men are oppressed with a sense of the insufficiency of their own views, and in struggling to overleap the barriers but too often fall exhausted on the ground, with no other result. Yet this struggle, however impotent in their own persons, calls attention to the fact, and awakens the clear eye of penetration which may see the outlet. This also has in some measure been done. The immense influx of German literature has brought with it an importation of its æsthetics—unfortunately only in fragments and imperfect insights—nowhere as a complete system; and the great diffusion of the works of the two Schlegels, already translated, is an evidence that the subject itself is not uncongenial. But to attain some more complete insight into Art, to produce something higher than acute fragmentary criticism, we must go back to Germany and obtain some idea of it as a science.

The definite meaning of the word "æsthetics" it may not be superfluous to explain. The mere word is vague and poor enough; it was invented by Baumgarten<sup>1</sup> many years ago to express "the doctrine of emotions" (*ab αἰσθάνομαι*), because Art addresses the

<sup>1</sup> *Æsthetica*, 1750.—Ed.

*feelings* rather than the intellect. But this, as all abstract terms, requires elucidation; and this elucidation can only be completely gained by a study of the *thing*, to which after a few remarks we shall address ourselves.

Æsthetics then is the philosophy of Art. It is not criticism, neither is it technical knowledge, but the theory of the inner life and essence of Art. It is not purely *empirical*, like criticism, which is the knowledge of peculiar facts or laws, derived from observation of works; but the theory of Art generally—the development of the fundamental Idea through its particular forms and manifestations, thus deducing all secondary laws, all critical canons, from the one primary law. Such is æsthetics as a science—the *a priori* theory of Art—the absolute statement of the conditions, means, and end of Art, rigorously deduced from philosophical principles. Criticism of course, if it would be philosophical, must grow out of an æsthetical foundation, as the practical and applied form of its philosophy, and so in common conversation or writing, æsthetics and criticism are often confounded. Nor is there much harm in this, if the empirical and philosophical natures of the two be always distinguished. When an incident, character, or sentiment is said to be not æsthetical, it is meant that such is *a violation of the feeling which it is the end of Art to produce*. Prosaic passages are therefore non-æsthetical, as are also contradictions of known laws of pleasurable emotion. Criticism is to æsthetics what the practice of medicine is to physiology—the



application to particular cases of the fundamental knowledge of the constitution and organisation of man, aided by a mass of particular observations. *Æsthetics* is the *physiology of Art*, and as all Art has a philosophical foundation, so it necessarily demands a philosophical elucidation. The necessity for a philosophical *fundus*, not only to criticism, but to all forms of speculation, cannot, one would think, for an instant be doubted, and certainly not by those imbued with German literature, where the existence of such a stratum lying underneath the whole of practical thought is the one thing prominent and distinctive.

But the deplorable condition in which criticism is tossing restlessly about on the great ocean of uncertainty, on all points deeper than mere technic, may be best ascertained by a consideration of the want of definiteness, the want of unanimity on the first question of all—on the question which must be clearly comprehended and solved before one single step can be taken, containing as it does the *germ* of all Art—we mean the oft-mooted question; *What is Poetry?* Have there not been innumerable essays, disquisitions, discussions, definitions, and prefaces, on this subject, and are we nearer the mark? Alas, no! The only cheering sign in the whole matter is the restlessness which, not satisfied with these vague generalities, ever prompts men to fresh attempts. This is an old question, and one which, from its very simplicity and our familiarity with its subject, is not easily analysed. Hence the vagueness and inapplicability of all definitions. Men do not look steadily and patiently at the

thing, but follow its shifting lights, dancing now here, now there, and give us but a sense of their own uneasiness for result. Thus when Schlegel calls it "the mirror of ideas eternally true," he is not only wrong (as we shall see) but extremely vague—what application can be made of such a definition? Schiller does not advance the matter by calling it "the representation of the supersensuous." Aristotle's celebrated dictum of poetry being an "imitative art," does not distinguish it from the other arts, and is moreover false.<sup>1</sup> To say poetry is an imitative art is to say nothing if true, but it is not true. An image is defined by Quatremère de Quincy to be "morally speaking the same as its model, though physically it is some other," and imitation is "to produce the resemblance of a thing, but in some other thing which becomes the image of it."<sup>2</sup> This is the best possible explanation for Aristotle, and yet it does not render his definition correct. Poetry is substitutive and suggestive, not imitative; words, not images, are employed; nor let it be supposed, as it too generally is, that words raise the images in our minds—they seldom, if ever, raise an *image* of the *thing*, often no images at all, as some of the finest passages will evidence.<sup>3</sup> Compare

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle says that Art besides "imitating" Nature also "completes Nature's unfinished designs." See Worsfold's *Principles of Criticism*, p. 144. Cp. Butcher's *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*.—Ed.

<sup>2</sup> *On Imitation in the Fine Arts*.

<sup>3</sup> Hegel's theory of language quite settles this point. We will only select one position. The *name*, according to him, has the same value as the representation, and it supplies its place in memory. Pronounce the name of a lion, and there is no need of the image of a lion, the *name* being the intellectual existence of the *thing*.

'Æschylus, Milton, or Shakspeare on this point. "It is one thing to make an idea clear, and another to make it *affecting* to the imagination."<sup>1</sup>

What *images* does Milton's description of Death call up?

"The other shape,  
If shape it might be call'd that shape had none  
Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb,  
Or substance might be call'd that shadow seem'd,  
For each seem'd either; black it stood as night,  
Fierce as ten furies, terrible as hell."<sup>2</sup>

If poetry be an imitative art—imitative of what? of external reality? images of what? of things seen or felt? Of what is the above passage imitative? "Whoever attentively considers the best passages of poetry will find that it does not in general produce its end by raising the images of things, but by *exciting a passion similar to that which real objects will excite by other means*."<sup>3</sup> This is profoundly true, and goes to the root of the matter. Even in description, when imitation would naturally be more close, the poet does *not* present images of the thing described. "Descriptive poetry consists, no doubt, *in* description, but in descriptions of things as they *appear*, not as they *are*; and it paints them, not in their bare natural lineaments, but arrayed in the colours and seen through the medium of the imagination set in

<sup>1</sup> Burke, *On the Sublime and Beautiful*. A book undeservedly neglected. If some of his theories be false, there are, nevertheless, admirable remarks scattered through it.

<sup>2</sup> *Paradise Lost*, Bk. II., 666.—ED.

<sup>3</sup> *Vide* Burke, *On the Sublime*, Part II., Sec. 3, 4, 5; and Part V., Sec. 5, 6, 7.

action by the feelings. If a poet is to describe a lion, he will not set about it as a naturalist would, intent on stating the truth, but by suggesting the most striking likenesses and contrasts *which might occur to a mind contemplating the lion* in the state of awe, wonder, or terror which the spectacle naturally excites.<sup>1</sup> The error we are uprooting is deeply seated and far spread; its traces are constantly visible in criticism; and it was so firmly believed in by Dr. Darwin, that he made it the groundwork of his poetry. A signal instance of his misapprehension occurs in the *Botanic Garden*, where he thus criticises Pope: "Mr. Pope has written a bad verse in the Windsor Forest,

‘And Kennet swift, for silver eels renown’d.’

The word ‘renown’d’ *does not present the idea of a visible object to the mind*, and thence is prosaic. But change the line thus,

‘And Kennet swift, where silver graylings play,’

it becomes poetry, *because the scenery is then brought before the eye.* If this were once admitted it would sweep away the finest poetry, and substitute *an animated catalogue of things*. This error is, as indeed is all error, an incomplete truth. It is true in part, and only false when applied to the *whole*. An image that is addressed to the *eye* should of course be clear and defined, or it is useless. Images in poetry are used to intensify, or render intelligible that which would otherwise not be so clear, and therefore a *visual* object may

<sup>1</sup> *Monthly Repository*, vol. vii. p. 63.

be brought to illustrate one that is not visual—but when thus selected it should be correct. So far Darwin's theory is admissible; but he makes the grand mistake of supposing that *all* images in poetry must be addressed to the eye; forgetting that the other senses, physical and moral (so to speak), are also addressed. Poetry then is not an imitative art, in any sense which may be legitimately given to imitation; nor can we think, with the Marquis de Santillana, that it is an invention of "useful things," which, being enveloped in a beautiful veil, are arranged, exposed, and concealed according to a certain calculation, measurement, and weight. "*E que es la poesia, que en nuestra vulgar llamamos gaya sciencia, sino un fingimento de cosas utiles, è velades con una hermosa cobertura, compuestas, distinguidas, escondidas por cierto cuento, peso è medida?*"<sup>1</sup> Our English critics talk elaborately about its being derived from ποίω, and meaning *creation*—whereupon many rhetorical flourishes, and the thing is done!

Done certainly, and to the complete satisfaction of the doer, but unhappily to the complete satisfaction of no other mortal, since the only possible value of a definition is, not the mere utterance of rhetoric, but the being able to use a searching, definite expression as a safety-lamp to guide us through the perplexed labyrinth of philosophy; and that no man *can* grasp any lamp hitherto proffered arises from the fact of its being, like Macbeth's dagger, a mere phantom "proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain" of the

<sup>1</sup> The foregoing sentence is a rendering of this quotation.—ED.

definer—a delusive Will-o'-the-wisp leading the confiding traveller through the muddiest bogs of error. The old scientific writers used to comfort their ignorance by saying that "nature abhors a vacuum," and so most men think poetry abhors a definition. We, on the contrary, think she abhors nothing, but eminently invites inspection; and "let us therefore," to use the words of a philosophical critic, "attempt, in the way of modest inquiry, not to coerce and confine nature within the bounds of an arbitrary definition, but rather to find the boundaries which she herself has set, and erect a barrier around them; not calling mankind to account for having misapplied the word poetry, but attempting to clear up to them the conception which they already attach to it, and to bring before their minds as a distinct *principle* that which as a vague *feeling* has really guided them in their actual employment of the term."<sup>1</sup>

We think Poetry demands two separate definitions, each the complement to the other.

1. Its *abstract* nature—i.e., Art as Art—the "spirit which informs" architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and poetry, considered in its abstract existence.

2. Its *concrete* nature—i.e., poetry as an individual art, and as such distinguished from the others, and from all forms of thought whatever. These definitions we offer as

1. *Poetry is the beautiful phasis of a religious Idea.*
2. *Poetry is the metrical utterance of emotion.* (This either expressive of emotion in itself, or calculated

<sup>1</sup> *Monthly Repository*, vol. vii. p. 60.

to raise emotion in the minds of others.) These two definitions, united into one general definition, may therefore stand thus: the metrical utterance of emotion, having beauty for its result, and pervaded by a religious Idea which it thereby symbolises.

The wording of these definitions may be questionable, and they require elucidation: the first may be called *the religious Idea incarnate in the beautiful*; but any formula must needs be elucidated: and this we proceed to attempt—till after which we beg the reader to suspend his judgment. The second we must consider first. Poetry must be emotive, it must be metrical—these are its conditions.

The domain of Art is not the intellect, but the emotions—not thought, but feeling; it occupies itself with thoughts only as they are associated with feelings; as Bettina profoundly says, “art is the intuition of spirit into the senses. *What you feel becomes thought, and what you strive to invent becomes sensual feeling;*”<sup>1</sup> and thus, as Coleridge and Wordsworth have long taught, the true antithesis to poetry is not prose, but *science*. “Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of science.”<sup>2</sup> Thoughts do and must abound in all good poetry, but they

<sup>1</sup> *Goethe's Correspondence with a Child*, vol. ii., 1837. [“Bettina,” or Bettine von Arnim (*née* Brentano), was an enthusiastic but rather troublesome admirer of Goethe.” Her correspondence with him (*Briefwechsel mit einem kinde*) is regarded as being partly fictitious. *Vide* Düntzer's *Life of Goethe*, vol. ii. p. 248.—Ed.]

<sup>2</sup> A. J. George, *Wordsworth's Prefaces and Essays on Poetry*, p. 18.—Ed.

are there not for their *own sake*, but for the *sake of a feeling*; a thought is sometimes the *root*, of which the feeling is the *flower*, and sometimes the *flower*, of which feeling is the *root*. Thought for thought's sake is science—thought for feeling's sake, and feeling for feeling's sake, are poetry.

And therefore must poetry be emotive. Take as an illustration Shakespeare's description of morning—

“Lo! where the morn, in russet mantle clad,  
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill.”<sup>1</sup>

Every one recognises this as poetry; yet change the *emotive expression* of it into a *statement* and it ceases to be poetry, or even change it into figurative prose, and by thus altering its emotive expression, which the “lo!” so well commences, the poetry is gone. Thus, “The morning now arises clothed in his mantle of russet, and walks over the dew on the high hill lying yonder in the east”—this is ornate prose. But perhaps the intense figurativeness of the language obscures our meaning; so take a line from *Childe Harold*—

“The moon is up—but yet it is not night!”<sup>2</sup>

These are two *statements*, which if put as *facts* in conversation are as prosaic as the statement of the weather, or the time of day; yet here the speaker himself is in a state of emotion—he utters it in awe, in mystery, in meditation—he does not announce it

<sup>1</sup> “But, look, the morn, in russet mantle clad,  
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill.”

—*Hamlet*, Act I., Sc. i.—Ed.

<sup>2</sup> Canto IV., Stanza 27.—Ed.



as a fact, and his emotion communicates itself to us. So Shakespeare's most religious saying, that there is a soul of goodness in things evil, is *in itself* no more than a philosophical opinion addressed to the understanding; but as such it would be thought for thought's sake (*i.e.*, science): here the *emotive expression* of it shows it to be for the sake of the feeling—

“God Almighty!

There is some soul of goodness in things evil,  
Would men observingly distil it out.”<sup>1</sup>

Pity that the solemn and fitting adjuration, “God Almighty,” should always be omitted when the passage is quoted!

But although *not always expressing* emotion, poetry must *always by some art excite it*, and never let its necessary statements or prosaic passages be prosaic in effect. Wordsworth often offends in this way by descriptions which are nothing more than *catalogues*; as take the following, which is, except a word here and there, ten-feet prose—

“’Tis nothing more  
Than the rude embryo of a little dome  
Or pleasure-house, once destined to be built  
Among the birch trees of this rocky isle.  
But, as it chanced, Sir William having learn’d  
That from the shore a full-grown man might wade,  
And make himself a freeman of this spot  
At any hour he chose, the knight forthwith  
Desisted, and the quarry and the mound  
Are monuments of his unfinish’d task.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Henry V.*, Act IV., Sc. i.—ED.

<sup>2</sup> *Inscriptions*.—ED.

If there were not so many hundred similar prosaic passages in Wordsworth, one would wonder that he could have let this pass; it is certainly antagonistic to the spirit of poetry, and is felt to be so, all critical canons apart. "These are the axioms of poetry," says Solger. "Everything must be action or emotion. Hence a purely *descriptive* poetry is impossible, if it confine itself to its subject without action or emotion; on which point Lessing has some admirable remarks in the *Laocoon*. In Homer you never see a particular subject merely *described*, but the description is always contained in some action. So the clothing of Agamemnon, or the shield of Achilles, where the subjects represented appear themselves as living and in action;"<sup>1</sup> and the reason of this is given by Hegel when he says, "not *things* and their practical existence, but pictures and imaginative symbols are the materials of poetry."

It is this emotive principle which creates all the ornaments, as they are styled, such as personification, metaphor, and trope; for nothing being announced as a fact, but everything as seen through the passionate medium of the speaker's soul, it necessitates a figurative impassioned language; and here Professor Wilson's definition of poetry, "man's thoughts tinged by his feelings," becomes admissible, except that it does not demarcate it from novels or oratory. "Ornaments" may be used by imitators and verse-makers, but they are always foreign, repulsive, and

<sup>1</sup> Solger, *Ästhetik*, 3ter Theil, 2ter Abschnitt. [*Vide* Rönnsfeldt's translation of Lessing's *Laocoon* (Scott Library), chaps. 16-20.—Ed.]

cumbersome, simply because they *are* ornaments ostentatiously worn for their glitter, and not real *associations* clinging round the central feeling. But in the true poet, imagination acting on the feeling, or the feeling acting on the imagination, condenses and fuses a whole series of ideas into one *verve* of expression; such is personification, one of the most poetical of figures, but which, when not springing from the ground of real passion, becomes an impertinence in the imitator or scholar-poet, and warms the mind no more than prose. When Milton speaks of

"The starry Galileo in his woes,"<sup>1</sup>

it is as if lightning flashed on the whole dark career of the man; all the scattered rays of light which have played around his name, his discoveries and his misfortunes are converged into one focus, and stand burning inextinguishably there. This is an instance of true passionate expression. Byron, in his celebrated stanzas on the Dying Gladiator, has given as striking an instance of the false expression—the merely *recherché* illustration suggested by thought or perception of analogies purely intellectual:—

"And through his side the last drops ebbing slow  
From the red gash, fall heavy, one by one,  
Like the first of a thunder shower."

Nothing can be more forced than the comparison of drops of blood to drops of rain. Note also the

<sup>1</sup> "The starry Galileo with his woes." By a slip of the pen Lewes refers this line to Milton. It is found in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto IV., Stanza 54.—ED.

antithesis of *last* drops of blood and *first* drops of rain. The common epithet "snowy bosom" is another example. Marini in Italy, and Gongora in Spain, as well as Cowley and Donne in England, only pushed this principle into a system, and the result was affectation or wit. It is against such ornaments, and the vicious *Gongorism* they induced, that Wordsworth's theory was virtually directed; and although he was radically wrong in saying poetry differed in nothing from prose, yet we confess that such ornaments as coquettes put on the bosoms of their verses are but as gauds to hide the wrinkled skin on which they glitter; still those who, in their fury of simplicity—who, in their disgust at dowager-diamonds, declare that a lovely maiden shall not place a rose in her hair, because ornament is unnecessary, commit a sad blunder, and slight the beautiful because the deformed will ape it. Wordsworth, in consequence, often writes passages worthlessly prosaic. Nevertheless, although *prosaic*, such are not *prose*, simply because of their metrical expression; and this leads us to the second point of our inquiry—viz., the essential position of verse.

The dispute as to whether "prose can be poetry," is one of the most astounding instances of the want of clear notions on art which could well be selected—it even beats the discussion as to whether Pope was a poet. The unanimity of critics, that verse is nothing *essential*, is so great as almost to overwhelm our deep-rooted convictions; and did we not fancy that we not only see their error, but also *how it became*

one, we should be tempted to give up in despair. Not only do writers perpetually caution their readers against supposing that *they* "regard verse as synonymous with poetry" (as in truth it is not)—of which opinion they have a religious horror—but the sum of the whole we take to be, in a recent critic's contending that Wycherley and Congreve were poets! The cause of this widespread error is partly owing to the want of clear definitions, partly that verse is a thing to be *learned* by all, whereas poetry is confessedly a talent given to few, and partly that many passages of prose are poetical. Poetical they may be, but not *poetry*—partaking of the *imaginative spirit*, but not of the *musical body*—a distinction always overlooked. It were as wise to talk of painting without colour as poetry without verse. Design is the groundwork—expresses the idea: but design alone is not painting: so thoughts or emotions uttered in prose are not poetry, but the mere *cartoons* of poetry. It is on all hands admitted that poetry is *an art*; if so, then we demand of the critic what are its conditions? Is prose an art? or is it the *same* art? These questions admit but of one answer. Much verse is employed by ambitious young gentlemen and ladies to express thoughts and feelings, real or imaginary, which criticism must admit to be very bad poetry, and which can get no recognition as art, except from the authors, and the "select friends" who "so earnestly urged their publication;" and the classing this trash with the Homers and Dantes, with all that we know of holy, indestructible beauty, may certainly blind

the angry critic. Nevertheless, public-house signs, or the delineations of Scotchmen standing before tobacconists' shops, are specimens of painting and sculpture *in degree*, though not of a degree to be admitted into Academy exhibitions. Turnspits are dogs, though of a beaten and despised race. Synonymous with poetry no one would assert verse to be; but an artistic element, a condition—*Eine sinnliche Hülle*—we insist upon being conceded to it. "Versified prose," says Hegel, "is not poetry, but simply verse; as a poetical expression of an otherwise prosaic handling is only poetical prose; nevertheless, metre is the first and only condition absolutely demanded by poetry, yea, even more necessary than a figurative, picturesque diction."<sup>1</sup>

Verse is the form of poetry; not the form as a thing *arbitrary*, but as a thing vital and essential; it is the incarnation of poetry. To call it the *dress*, and to consider it apart as a thing distinct, is folly, except in technical instruction. Rhythm is not a thing invented by man, but a thing *evolved* from him,<sup>2</sup> and it is not merely the accidental form, but

<sup>1</sup> *Ästhetik*, b. iii., p. 289.

<sup>2</sup> This has been irrefutably put by a contemporary. "All emotion which has taken possession of the whole being—which flows irresistibly, and therefore equably—instinctively seeks a language that flows equably like itself, and must either find it, or be conscious of an unsatisfied want, which even impedes and prematurely stops the flow of feeling. Hence, ever since man has been man, all deep and sustained feeling has tended to express itself in rhythmical language, and the deeper the feeling the more characteristic and decided the rhythm, provided always the feeling be sustained as well as deep. For a fit of passion has no natural connection with verse or music; a mood of passion the strongest."—*Westminster Review*, April 1838, p. 42.

the only possible form of poetry; for there is a rhythm of feeling correspondent in the human soul. "Melody," said Beethoven, "is the sensual life of poetry. Do not the spiritual contents of a poem become sensual feeling through melody?" Verse is the type of the soul within.

Poetry then, we agree with Wordsworth, is not the antithesis to prose, neither is animal the antithesis to plant; but a generic difference exists, which it is always fatal to overlook. Verse is not synonymous with poetry, but is the incarnation of it; and prose may be emotive—poetical, but never poetry. To those who assert that all that is said in verse might be equally said in prose, we answer, as soon might cabbages be violets; we may as well object to the restricted size of the violet, forgetting its odour, or to its want of utility, forgetting its beauty. George Sand, in *Les Sept Cordes de la Lyre*, has a fine answer to some objections on the incompleteness of the form of art for the communication of truth: "Maître, vous oubliez que l'art est une forme, et rien autre chose." And a greater than George Sand has profoundly said—

"Misset in dem Kunstbetrachten  
Immer Eins wie Alles achten,  
Nichts ist drinnen, Nichts is draussen  
Denn was *innen*, das ist *aussen*."<sup>1</sup>

We wish this point to be well weighed, because, if we are correct in our conclusions, they lead to important

<sup>1</sup> Goethe, *Werke*, vol. iii. p. 86 (Stuttgart, 1828). Lewes evidently relied on his memory in quoting these lines. In the original they run thus:—

results, and many old debated questions vanish at once. Their principal merit consists in demarcating poetry from everything else—from novels or from eloquence,—a distinction all have felt, and none clearly explained. Coleridge is everywhere vague and unsatisfactory, and can find no other distinction between poetry and novels, than that “poetry permits the production of a highly pleasurable whole, of which each part shall also communicate for itself a distinct and conscious pleasure.” The distinction has, however, been so ingeniously put by the philosophical critic before quoted, and the passage contains so much noteworthy matter, that we extract it:—

“Poetry and eloquence are both alike the expression or uttering forth of feeling. But, if we may be excused, the seeming affectation of the antithesis, we should say that eloquence is *heard*, poetry is *over-heard*. Eloquence supposes an audience; the peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet’s utter unconsciousness of a listener. Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself in moments of solitude, and

“Müsst im Naturbetrachten  
Immer eins wie alles achten;  
Nichts ist drinnen, nichts ist draussen;  
Denn was innen das ist aussen.  
So ergreifet ohne Saumniss  
Heilig öffentlich Geheimniss.”

*Trans.*—“In the contemplation of Nature, you must ever regard the One as the All; nothing is inner, nothing is outer; for what is within, that is without. Therefore, without hesitation, make that holy mystery your own.” The difference between *Kunstbetrachten* and *Naturbetrachten* renders the quotation somewhat irrelevant.—ED.



bodying forth itself in symbols, which are the nearest possible representations of the feeling in the exact shape in which it exists in the poet's mind. Eloquence is feeling pouring itself forth to other minds, courting their sympathy, or endeavouring to influence their belief, or move them to passion or to action."<sup>1</sup>

The critic thence deduces the reason why the "French, who are the *least* poetical of all great and refined nations, are amongst the *most* eloquent; the French also being the most sociable, the vainest, and the least self-dependent." But it appears to us that the critic has here fixed his eye solely on the *spirit*, forgetting the form; he has looked at the creative *mind* of the artist, not at the *work of art*; regarding the motive, not the result. We maintain that verse alone, by conditioning the art, is the grand distinction between poetry and every other art.

We have now disposed of the second, or *technical* part of our definition, and are now in a condition to examine the first part—the *beautiful phasis of a religious Idea*.

The word "beautiful" itself might challenge a definition, were it not sufficiently intelligible from the context; but "*pleasurable*" might also be substituted. That the medium of Art must necessarily be the Beautiful, no one doubts; but unfortunately this dictum is not sufficiently applied in criticism, or the Deformed and Disgusting would not so often have been suffered to pass. "The world of art," says Jean Paul, "must be the highest, the most ideal

<sup>1</sup> *Monthly Repository*, vol. vii. p. 64.

wherein every pang dissolves into a greater pleasure, and where we resemble men on mountain-tops; the storm which bursts heavily on the real life and world below, is to us but as a cooling shower. Hence every poem is unpoetical, as every song is unmusical that ends with a discord."<sup>1</sup> It is indeed another world, wherein our own is reflected, but idealised; and in its struggles and battles no blood flows from the wounded foot-soldier, but celestial *ichor* from a wounded god. This is triumphantly shown in music—

"Yearning like a god in pain,"<sup>2</sup>

as Keats so beautifully says, where the most plaintive melodies—strains that move the heart to tears, are still always tempered into rapture by the pervading spirit of beauty. There is a song in the mind of every true poet which likewise tempers his painful thoughts; and the great poet is nowhere more recognisable than in this song, which gives him free movement in the absurdly called "shackles" of verse. Wherever you discern the "shackles," you may be sure the mind is a captive, and no golden eagle "wantoning in the smile of Jove." You discern the shackles by the "fillings up," by the irrelevancies introduced for the sake of a rhyme, etc.

If this be admitted, it strikes at the root of Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction, since the condition imposed of a beautiful medium requires that the diction be not "the ordinary language of mankind,"

<sup>1</sup> *Verschule der Ästhetik*, b. i.

<sup>2</sup> "The Eve of St. Agnes."

but a language fitted for the ideal mouths it issues from; and this must not be done alone by figurative, passionate, or personified phrases, but by an abstraction of all mean and ludicrous words. Certain associations cling round certain words, and the poet must comply with these; if they be ridiculous he must avoid them, because the reader cannot escape the unlucky associations. Suppose a version of the *Iliad* opening thus—

"*John Thompson's wrath* to us the direful spring."

Or the *Orlando Furioso* thus—

"The Wilsons, Smiths, the Wigginses and Browns."

Yet this is scarcely an exaggeration on a sonnet of Wordsworth's commencing—

"Spade with which Wilkinson has till'd his land!"<sup>1</sup>

Now we defy the reader to be pleasurably moved by *Wilkinson*: the name is a name "*comme un autre*," and no doubt denotes many a respectable family, but the gods have not decreed it poetical; on the contrary, its abundant use by comic writers, coupled to its oddity as a sound, have consecrated it to fun, and not to poetry—sonnets least of all. *Wilkinson* is, therefore, a violation of the ideal. "*Achilles' wrath*" does very well. *Achilles* is an ideal personage, of whom, had we previously known nothing, we might predicate what greatness we pleased; but

<sup>1</sup> "Spade! with which Wilkinson hath tilled his lands."—From *Poems of Sentiment and Reflection*. Lewes is mistaken in calling it a sonnet.—ED.

"John Thompson" is the name of our butcher, or who sat next to us in the pit last night, or sent a begging letter—how *can* the name denote ideal character? It is useless arguing the point with the public: Harry Gill and Betty Foy *do* excite the ludicrous, and destroy all impression of poetry. Wordsworth is so insensible to this, or so obstinate in his theory, that he mingles risibilities and puerilities with magnificent and intense poetry.

We have now to consider it in the light of one *phasis of a religious Idea*.

No nation hitherto known has been without its poetry; but then does this potent universality indicate nothing? has poetry had no other end than the one actually alleged—amusement? or is it true, as is often said, that "the arts spring from the natural propensities of mankind, and *fill up the idle hour of the savage as well as that of the more luxurious civilised nation?*" This opinion, which could only have arisen in the mind of a dry logician, degrades Art to a mere doll and fancy-fair production; but fortunately the logic is as false as it is degrading. It is a confusion of means with an end. "The pleasure that the organ receives," says Quatremère de Quincy, "is indeed one of the ends of art, since, if that pleasure did not exist, the action of the art itself would be as if it were not. But that such can be its *true end*, is one of the errors arising from ignorance and thoughtlessness; as well might it be maintained that the pleasure derived from eating is the end of that want, while it is surely nothing more than a

means of attaining another pleasure, that of health, strength, and the use of our faculties. The pleasure is a means which nature herself has placed as an incentive to those appetites, that lead the way to the accomplishment of all her designs."<sup>1</sup>

The opinion often advocated in Germany and France, of "Art for Art's sake," of Art's knowing no end beyond itself, is a little better, but we think equally incorrect, and equally confounding means with an end; for in looking narrowly at the history of poetry, we find everywhere one determinate element and condition, which we hold to be the soul of Art, and this is its religious Idea. Every poet stands at the head of his age at once its child and prophet; and the psalm which breaks solemnly from him, however varied by the music of his feelings, ever retains the one burthen—*elevation of the race he addresses into a higher sphere of thought.*

"The muse," says Sir Walter Scott, "records, in the lays of inspiration, the history, the laws, the very religion of savages. Hence there has hardly been found any nation so brutishly rude as not to listen with enthusiasm to the songs of their bards, recounting the exploits of their forefathers, recording their laws and moral precepts, and hymning the praises of their deities."<sup>2</sup> Be it observed, that so far from poetry being the "mirror of ideas eternally true," it must, on the contrary, ever be the mirror of *truths of periods*, because the poet cannot but see through the medium of his age, cannot see *much* beyond it, but

<sup>1</sup> *On Imitation in the Fine Arts*, translation, p. 180.

<sup>2</sup> Introduction to *Border Minstrelsy*.

must inevitably, if he would get a hearing, utter its spirit and wisdom in their highest point. What is truth? how is it to be stamped with eternity? where is its criterion? The truth of to-day is the doubt of to-morrow; how then can the poet *get at* this eternal truth? That which alone is eternally true to human cognisance is human passion, and this is the ever-green of poetry. The wild war-song of the savage is undoubtedly poetry; and although the barbarity, cunning, and ferocity it praises and inculcates are, to an advanced civilisation, very revolting, they are to the savage the highest wisdom. "*Celebrare res præclare gestas ac virorum fortium virtutes antiqua fuit Arabibus consuetudo. Neque est ullum pœscos genus utilius: nihil enim est præstabilius quam animum ad virtutes impellere atque incendere, nihil porro ad eum finem consequendum efficacius, quam ea proferre exempla, quæ lector admiretur et sibi imitanda proponat.*"<sup>1</sup> To the same effect the admirable old dramatist—

"How it doth stir the airy part of us  
To hear our poets tell imagined fights,  
And the strange blows that feigned courage gives I  
When I Achilles hear upon the stage  
Speak honour, and the greatness of his soul,  
Methinks I too could on the Phrygian spear,  
Run boldly, and make tales for other times."

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<sup>1</sup> Sir W. Jones's *Peer. Asia.*, cap. xvi. [*Trans.*—"It was an ancient custom with the Arabs to sing the valour and noble deeds of great men. Nor is there any kind of poetry more useful: for nothing is more excellent than to excite the mind and impel it to valour; nor is anything more effectual for securing this object than to set forth such examples as the reader may admire and purpose to imitate."—ED.]

Homer expressly states that glorious actions and noble destinies are the substance of poetry;<sup>1</sup> and Pierre Vidal, the celebrated Troubadour, in his advice to one of his brethren as to the mode of exercising the profession, also teaches this. He considers it as the storehouse of universal philosophy, and the cultivation of high sentiment; that it is the bond of union between heroes, and that the duty of the Troubadour is to awaken in the next generation the high sentiments which had been the glory of their forefathers.<sup>2</sup> "Even our Saviour," says Sir Philip Sydney, "might as well have given the moral commonplaces of uncharitableness and humbleness, as the divine narration of Lazarus and Dives, or of disobedience and mercy, as that heavenly discourse of the lost child and gracious Father; but that his thorough-searching wisdom knew the estate of Dives burning in hell, and of Lazarus being in Abraham's bosom, would more constantly, as it were, inhabit both the memory and judgment."<sup>3</sup>

These citations, which might be indefinitely multiplied, are sufficient to show how impressed men have been from all times with the great *moral* influence of poetry; but this moral influence in final analysis becomes a religious Idea. By a religious Idea we do not mean the formalised religion of the epoch, nor even an acknowledged part of it, but, *more Germanico*, regard every Idea as partaking essentially of the

<sup>1</sup> Compare II. vi. 358; *Od.* iii. 204, xxiv. 197, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Sismondi's *Lit. du Midi.*, i.; see also Millot, ii. p. 283.

<sup>3</sup> *Defence of Poesy.*

religious character, which is the formula of any truth leading to new contemplations of the infinite, or to new forms in our social relations. Thus liberty, equality, humanity (the three-fold form of this century's mission) are not, so to speak, "doctrinal points" in the formalised religion of the epoch; but inasmuch as they express (in the final analysis) the object and faith of the crusade in which all Europe is now sensibly or insensibly engaged, and as they have to complete a great social end, so may they be considered as eminently religious. We caution the reader against any narrow or exclusive interpretation of our expressions; nor must he be hasty in making his application of them. We admit that the poet does not give to this Idea its naked expression, nor is he even conscious of it; such is the task of the philosopher. Moreover, although we use the word Idea in its highest abstract sense, as expressing *potentially* the whole spirit of the age, yet we are aware of how many antagonistic different elements it is made up, and consequently each poem will mostly contain but one or more of these elements; not the entire Idea. But this may become clearer after the following remarks.

The most ever-present manifestation in the history of poetry is its immediate connection with religion. Hymns, sacred traditions, prayers, and passionate aspirings and hopes for the future, form the staple of all antique poetry. "Art," says Dr. Ulrici, "is in its origin ever one with religion—a proof of its God-like origin, as *a mediate and secondary revelation*."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ulrici, *Shakespeare's Dramat., Kunst*, p. 1.



Not only in its *origin*, it is in its essence one with religion; and its deviation from its sacred office, as civilisation progresses, is only *apparent*, for the end of both must ever be one and the same. The end of religion, universally considered, is not its *speculative belief*, but its *practical result*; the translation of that hieroglyphic alphabet of *faith* into its corresponding symbols of *action*; thus leading mankind to a higher, purer state of being than the uneducated instincts and unrestrained passions ever could attain. Such is also the end of poetry, pursuing that end, however, through the Beautiful. It captivates rather than dogmatizes; instead of purifying the soul by means of fasts, penances, and prayers, it works its end through the emotions. Religion also works through the emotions; but it must assume the dogmatic, positive form, and must call in to its aid the understanding—*i.e.*, philosophy, thereby addressing the intellect. Majendie defines the passions as "the triumph of the viscera over the intellect;" it is equally the province of religion and poetry to attain the triumph of the moral over the physical man.<sup>1</sup> "In poetry," says Dr. Lowth, "you have the energetic voice of virtue herself. She not only exhibits

<sup>1</sup> We have before cautioned the reader against narrow interpretations of our expressions. By religion here we do not mean the Christian only, but every religion of which we have knowledge. We are here neither confounding nor separating the true from the false, but simply stating to what all equally pretend. In the same way we speak of *all* poetry, not of any one class or of any one period. Indeed, our speculations are purely abstract.

examples, but she fixes them in the mind.”<sup>1</sup> The learned Michaelis, in his notes on Lowth’s “Hebrew Poetry,” observes: “There are, however, some poems which only delight, but which are not therefore to be condemned; some which, though they contain no *moral precept*, no commendation of virtue, no sentiment curious or abstruse, yet dress and adorn common ideas in such splendour and harmony of diction and numbers as to afford exquisite pleasure; they bring, as it were, at once before our eyes the woods and streams, and all elegant objects of nature.” Here the learned scholar has not seen deeply enough, he has not reduced these questions to their final analysis; for such poems, without *positively*, dogmatically teaching any moral truth, yet *indirectly* establish the end of all morality. The office of poetry is not *moral instruction*, but *moral emulation*; not doctrine, but inspiration. The very fact of rendering us enamoured of existence, by pointing out the endless beauties squandered at our feet, and mostly trampled on by our dull preoccupations of business or idleness, is sufficient. Furthermore, all poetry need not be epic, or dramatic; there are glow-worms as well as stars, and as these small but brilliant lights do form a small part of the great nature, so, as before hinted, the various elements which constitute the idea must be represented, reproduced. Even in the sterner forms of religion herself, graceful and joyous hymns

<sup>1</sup> *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*. London, 1787. With Notes by J. D. Michaelis.—ED.

are admitted, and constitute indeed a part of the worship. But let us hear Hegel on the object and aim of art.

"It is its object and aim to bring within the circle of our senses perceptions and emotions, everything which has existence in the mind of man. Art should realise in us the well-known saying, '*Nihil humani à me alienum puto.*' Its appointed aim is—to awake and give vitality to all slumbering feelings, affections, and passions; to fill and expand the heart, and to make man, whether developed or undeveloped, feel in every fibre of his being *all* that human nature can endure, experience, and bring forth in her innermost and most secret recesses; *all* that has power to move and arouse the heart of man in its profoundest depths, manifold capabilities, and various phases; to garner up for our enjoyment whatever, in the exercise of thought and imagination, the mind discovers of high and intrinsic merit, the grandeur of the lofty, the eternal, and the true, and present it to our feeling and contemplation. In like manner, to make pain and sorrow, and even vice and wrong, become clear to us; to bring the heart into immediate acquaintance with the awful and terrible, as well as with the joyous and pleasurable; and lastly, to lead the fancy to hover gently, dreamily, on the wing of imagination, and entice her to revel in the seductive witchery of its voluptuous emotion and contemplation. Art should employ this manifold richness of its subject-matter to supply on the one hand the deficiencies of our actual experience of external life,

and on the other hand to excite in us those passions which shall *cause the actual events of life to move us more deeply, and awaken our susceptibility for receiving impressions of all kinds*. For we do not here require absolute experience to excite these emotions, but only the *appearance* (Schein) thereof, which art substitutes for sheer reality. The possibility of this illusion, by means of the representations of Art (Schein der Kunst), rests upon this, that *every reality must pass through the representative medium* (i.e., that we know things *mediately* by *ideas*, not things) before it can be cognised by the mind, or acted on by the will, and therefore it is immaterial whether we are acted on by external immediate reality, or receive our impressions through other means—viz., pictures, signs, or forms, which represent the qualities of this reality. Man can also picture to himself unreal things as if they absolutely possessed reality. Therefore, whether we receive the impression of a situation, a relation, or the subject-matter of a life, through the medium of external reality, or only through the representation of it, in both cases we are sufficiently affected to sorrow and rejoice, to be moved or agitated according to the nature of the subject, and in both cases we run through, in quick succession, the feelings and passions of anger, hate, pity, anxiety, terror, love, esteem, wonder, honour, and fame.”<sup>1</sup>

Art then, we see, is the reproduction of the spiritual world in a beautiful and pleasurable shape; it is the “interpreting tongue” in the fine remark of Horace—

<sup>1</sup> *Æsthetik*, b. i., Einleitung, p. 60.

"Format enim natura prius nos intus ad omnem  
 Fortunarum habitum: juvat aut impellit ad iram—  
 Aut ad humum morem gravi deducit, et angit:  
 Post effert animi motus interprete lingua."<sup>1</sup>

"For," says Hegel in the same spirit, "even in tears lies consolation. Man, when entirely absorbed in his sorrow, demands at least the outward manifestation of this inward pain. But the expression of these feelings by means of words, pictures, tones, and forms is still more softening; and therefore was it a good custom of the ancients to have female mourners at deaths and burials, as it brought grief into contemplation in its external form; or more especially as it showed the mourner his own grief expressed by others. For thus the whole subject of his sorrow would be brought under his view, and he would be compelled, by its frequent repetition, to reflect upon it, and so would be relieved. Thus abundant tears and many words have always been found the surest means of throwing off the overwhelming weight of sorrow, or at least of relieving the oppressed heart."

But while advocating the opinion that poets are and ever have been *docti sapientes*, that poetry must have some end beyond amusement, some ideal beyond itself, we must protest against the dogma of its being "a moral teacher," and of always demanding the *moral* of a work of art: such a theory

<sup>1</sup> *Ars Poetica*, 107 et seq. Trans.—"For there is that in our nature which adapts itself to every variety of circumstance; delights us or drives us to anger; or bows us to the ground in deep sadness and torments us; then the interpreting tongue expresses the thoughts of the mind."—ED.

may be very suitable to the select "academies" where youths "receive religious and moral instruction—singlestick if required," or may serve to bind up with Blair's lectures, but it is suitable to nothing else.

"The moral effect of works of ideal art," writes Mr. R. H. Horne, himself both poet and critic, "is humanising, chiefly because they excite refined emotions without advocating any exclusive or dogmatic moral. Their true mission is to enlarge the bounds of human sympathy. It was universally the custom in this country, till within the last few years, to ask, 'What is the moral of the piece?' The answer was always absurd or infantine; frequently turning upon the 'naughty' parts of the story, some quotation from a school catechism of maxims, or a common proverb, but more commonly one of the ten commandments; which latter, in a Christian country, we should have thought might have been taken for granted, without so many illustrations. What is the moral of Othello? An instructive grandmother would obviously say, unequal marriages are dangerous, or you should not kill your wife from jealousy. What of Lear? 'We ought not to be unreasonable, exacting, and passionate when we grow very old; or we ought to be too prudent to give away all our property before we die.'<sup>1</sup> And Hegel, who willingly recognises the fact that "Art was the first teacher," argues at some length the untenable and faulty positions occupied with respect to

<sup>1</sup> "Essays on Tragic Influence," prefixed to his noble tragedy of *Gregory F.R.*

its aim as a moral instructor,<sup>1</sup> contending that all dogma, all philosophy in art, should be *implicit*, not *explicit*; admirably observing, "From every genuine work of art a good moral is to be drawn; but then this is a *deduction*, and indeed entirely depends upon *him* who draws it." It remains then to be seen *what* the essential position of poetry specially is, and in how far it may be regarded as "the beautiful phasis of a religious Idea."

Religion, philosophy, and poetry, intimately as they are connected, have nevertheless distinct forms of existence, and the distinction is almost universally considered to be one of *essence*. We hold, on the contrary, that they are but the three-fold form of the Idea,<sup>2</sup> that they are *identical* (in the philosophical meaning of that term) in their subject-matter, but that the various spheres into which their respective elements have forced them, have caused them to be considered as various in their essence. It has been well shown by Ritter, in his *Geschichte der Philosophie*, that were religion to acquire a *scientific accuracy of statement*, it would of necessity cease to be religion, and become philosophy. But religion invariably and necessarily announces its dogmata as *at once established and determined by revelation*, on the authority of which they possess immediately on

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Ästhetik*, i., Einleitung, pp. 66-73.

<sup>2</sup> Hegel's *Grund-princip* is very similar, though we met with it long after our own was elaborated, and the coincidence is curious. He says, "Bei dieser Gleichheit des Inhalts sind die drei Reiche des absoluten Geistes nur durch die *Formen* unterschieden, in welchen sie ihr Objekt, das Absolute, zum Bewusstseyn bringen."

their announcement an irresistible claim to assent. Philosophy, on the other hand, draws its assent, its faith from cautious *reason*; it is continually impelled to comprehend every ascertained result in its dependence and co-ordination to the universal tendency of reason towards knowledge.

*"A toutes les époques de la civilisation règne une pensée obscure, intime, profonde, qui se développe comme elle peut dans l'élément extérieur de cette époque, dans les lois, dans les arts, la religion, lesquels sont pour elle des symboles plus ou moins clairs qu'elle traverse successivement pour revenir à elle-même, et pour acquérir de soi une conscience et une intelligence complète, après avoir épuisé son développement total. De cette conscience et cette intelligence, elle ne l'acquiert que dans la philosophie. C'est la philosophie qui se charge, pour ainsi dire, de la traduire en une formule abstraite, nette, et précise."*<sup>1</sup>

To this let us add what M. Jouffroy<sup>2</sup> says of poetry and philosophy:—

*"The former gives utterance in song to the sentiments of the epoch on the good, the beautiful, and the*

<sup>1</sup> Cousin, *Cours de Phil.*, i. [Trans.—"Every epoch of civilisation is dominated by an Idea at once vital, profound, and dimly recognised—an Idea which unfolds itself as it is able in the more tangible element of each epoch; in laws, in arts, and in religion. These are the media, more or less expressive, through which it passes to return to itself, and to obtain for itself a consciousness and complete understanding, after having exhausted its total development. This consciousness and understanding are acquired in Philosophy alone. It is Philosophy which takes the responsibility, so to speak, of translating it into abstract form, clearly and accurately."—Ed.]

<sup>2</sup> *Essays on Philos. of Hist.*



true. *It expresses the indistinct thought of the masses in a manner that is more animated though not more clear, because it feels this thought more vividly, but comprehends it as little. This is comprehended only by philosophy. If poetry comprehended it, poetry would become philosophy, and disappear.* The true poets are always children of their age. The philosophers always are so in regard to their point of departure; but as we before said, it is their mission to take the lead of the age, and prepare the way for a future (also the poet's mission). They share the sentiments—this is their point of departure; they reflect upon them, they comprehend them, they express them—this is their work. Then, and by these means, the epoch comprehends what it loves, what it thinks, what it wishes for; its idea is reduced to a symbol, and with all its power it then tends to its realisation."

To a similar effect Carlyle—

"He who should write a history of poetry would depict for us the successive revelations which man has attained of the spirit of nature; under what aspect he had caught and endeavoured to body forth some glimpses of that unspeakable beauty, which in its highest clearness is religion, and which in one or other degree must inspire every true singer, were his theme never so humble."<sup>1</sup>

And Hegel thus explicitly states the relation of the three—

"Art fulfils its highest mission when it has thus established itself with religion and philosophy in the

<sup>1</sup> *Miscellaneous*, vol. ii. p. 256.

one circle common to all, and is merely a method of revealing the God-like to man, of giving utterance to the deepest interests, the most comprehensive truths pertaining to mankind. In works of art nations have deposited the most holy, the richest and intensest of their ideas, and for the understanding of the philosophy and religion of a nation, art is mostly the only key we can attain."<sup>1</sup>

And finally Shelley, in his most profound and beautiful "Defence of Poetry"<sup>2</sup>—

"Poets . . . are not only the authors of language and of music, of the dance, of architecture, of statuary and painting, they are the institutors of laws and founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life, and the teachers who draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and true, that partial apprehension of the agencies of the invisible world which is called religion. . . . Poets, according to the circumstances of the age and nation in which they appeared, were called, in the earlier epochs of the world, legislators or prophets: a poet *essentially comprises and unites both these characters*. For he not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flower, and the fruit of latest time. . . . *The most unfailing herald, companion, and follower of the awakening of a great*

<sup>1</sup> *Ästhetik*, b. i., Einleitung, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Essays and Letters from Abroad*—a work no admirer of the poet should be without.

*people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution is poetry. . . . Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle and feel not what they inspire. . . . Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."*

We have cited these passages for the weight of their authority; when we consider how different the men, the nations, the habits of thought, and the philosophy from which they sprung—Ritter, Cousin, Jouffroy, Carlyle, Hegel, and Shelley, it would be difficult to select names more opposed thus agreeing. They all, as it seems to us, felt and expressed very vividly separate portions of the truth; an eclectic patience evolves the whole of the truth, *i.e.*, that "poetry is the beautiful phasis of a religious Idea." The poet must ever be the great teacher of his age; he stands at the altar rapt, holy, impassioned, prophet-like, giving utterance to the inarticulate yearnings, feelings, and wants of his brethren; embodying their tendencies, mirroring all, and mirrored in all the age produces; the myriad hopes and doubts that sway their minds to and fro, break forth from his lips in passionate music. He speaks in beauty, but mistake not that beauty for his end! Assert no such atheistic, epicurean creed! He makes you in *love* with the truth and virtue which religion has *ordained* and philosophy *proved*; he sets before you splendid pageants of heroic endurance, of patient suffering, of unexampled

fortitude and struggling; he reveals the riches lying within you and around you, in the exercise of your soul in the free converse with nature; he points to a future brighter than the past, happier than the present; he couches your eye from the thick film of selfishness, and by keeping the ideal to which all aspire constantly before your eyes, he leads you to the goal of religion, and opens in your heart the well-spring of happiness—happiness which is as the psalm of thanksgiving from man to nature—the realisation of that righteousness of which it is written, “all its paths are pleasantness, and all its ways are peace.” Thus the three Ideas of faith, science, and virtue become realised in religion, philosophy, and art. “Je définis donc la métaphysique l'idée de Dieu, et la poésie le sentiment de Dieu.”<sup>1</sup>

If our theory be false, if there be no idea lying beneath the expression, and if poetry be the mere expression of feeling for feeling's sake, how comes it that all times do not alike produce poets? How is it that poetry arises in cycles, gets its doctrine uttered by half-a-dozen men, and then slumbers for centuries to arise again with pristine vigour?

*Accident* is a favourite theory, but an untenable one.

<sup>1</sup> George Sand, *Les Sept Cordes de la Lyre*. And Hegel says, “Da wir von der Kunst als aus der absoluten Idee selber hervorgehend gesprochen, ja als ihren Zweck die sinnliche Darstellung des Absoluten selber angegeben haben,” which is the metaphysical expression of our opinion, “the representation of the godlike, or of the idea,” seems the very formula wanted; and the *hervorgehend*, does it not also express the *varieties*, i.e., nature (Idee) working through her various gradations and phases, and thus presenting different aspects, to which artists successively give *die sinnliche Darstellung*?

Look at history, and see if the indications be not too universal and too regular for accident. It has been repeatedly remarked that it is not in times of luxurious idleness and fat peace, but in those of conflict and trouble, that the arts have been most flourishing. Look at Athens, that perpetual struggle of men. Look at Italy in the days of Dante and Petrarca, distracted by factions, wars, and contentions of all kinds. Look at England under Elizabeth and James (which was the new birth of an era,—Protestantism accepted and believed after its fierce struggle), also after the Rebellion, and after the French revolution. Wherever you cast your eyes, the same phenomenon presents itself. The reason is, that *every revolution or internal change is the birth of a creed which is felt by the whole mass*; the philosophers have long known the ideas contained therein, but the revolution is the result of the participation of the mass of mankind; the poet arises to utter the collective creed, with its hopes for the future. He does not, as we before hinted, give this Idea its naked expression; and indeed (unless the word poet be used as the abstract and expression of the whole voice of poetry at any time) he does not either feel or comprehend this Idea in its completeness, but only in one or more phases thereof: hence the necessity for more than one singer; hence Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, Rogers, Campbell, Keats, Moore, Crabbe, etc., were each necessary to the completing of the Idea of their epoch; and hence also the reason of the crowds of imitators, successful and otherwise, who walk in the

footsteps of a newly-arisen poet. Their inarticulate yearnings and thoughts they have found articulate in his works, and they join their voices in the plaintive wail, the Titanic struggle, or jubilant hope, uttering *similar* thoughts rather than imitating his. Every man that has a real insight of more or less depth, is something more than an imitator; for he helps to complete that portion of the Idea at which he works. An Idea is not the work of one man, but of many; not of one day, but of an epoch; and each one gives it his own imperfect formula. The great poet may feel it in its totality more intensely than another, but no one man can complete it. If then, as Hegel says, the key to the philosophy and religion of a nation is to be found in its poetry, so we may reverse it, and say that the philosophical Idea of an epoch being given, we have at once the key to its poetry. Indeed no criticism on a past epoch's poetry can be significant without a clear conception of the dominant Idea of that epoch, and it is owing to the neglect of this that so much nonsense has been written on the ancients. Let us not be misunderstood: we repeat again and again that the poet does not, cannot give the scientific accuracy or expression to the Idea—this is the province of philosophy; *but the Idea must ever, in one of its grand or minute phases, be the basis of his poem*; and moreover, as there are many conflicting Ideas in every epoch, the various poets will severally express them, but the dominant one alone carries immortality with it.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It will have been apparent that we have used the word "Idea" in its European philosophical sense, as the synhelical expression of each

Holding these opinions, we cannot but look favourably on the fact of the march of intellect having been followed by the diffusion of poetry, and however we may be for the moment irritated at the self-sufficiency and presumption of the *dii minores*, whose verses manufactured for the day are forgotten on the morrow, and whose "pretensions widen every smile their imbecility excited," because such pretensions must always be ridiculous; yet apart from these, no one, we think, can be indifferent to the daily increasing influence and production of poetry. As religion in earliest times was expounded by a few priests, and was *understood* by them alone, but has now, through its Christian development, become intelligible and practicable to millions; so poetry, in becoming thus diffused, is developing its mission, widening its influence, and daily becoming a more potent element of life. Most foolish is the cry that "poetry is dead," or "poetry's a drug." Poetry never dies, never becomes a drug, and least of all now, when every day brings fresh writers, and every day republications in all possible forms and at all prices, of all possible waters. The glory and intense apostolic radiance may have become dim, because there is no new creed to breathe fiery inspiration into the nostrils of men, and poetry is occupying herself in the lower province of *completing* her Idea; but that it exists, that it

great element of the spirit of the age. Thus analysis was the dominant Idea of the eighteenth century, humanity (liberty, progression) of the nineteenth. Feudalism, monarchism, Protestantism, Catholicism, etc., are but formulas which we name Ideas.

## OF ART

revels in its superabundant life, can only be denied by those unfortunates for whom the steep of Parnassus remains a steep—the earth crumbling beneath their heavy feet. Nevertheless, the meanest cultivator, whether he attain Parnasscan eminence or not, has glimpses of that infinite to which all aspire, regards nature with a more penetrating and appreciating eye, looks radically at the soul of man in preference to his conventional trappings, cultivates the affections and sympathies, and develops the philosophy of beauty and happiness more than another. It is nothing to say that he is but an echo or re-echo of others; admitting, we only thereby assert his relative *rank*, and negative the probability of his becoming an object of *renown*; but as far as his own soul is concerned, it is much for him that *it* is not dead, not wrapped up in the dull atmosphere of self-reference and “respectability,” but that the air of heaven can blow freshly on it; that it can admit “the strains of higher mood,” which burst from the chorded harps of the great minstrels who have gone before, and filled the world with music unto everlasting time; it is much for him that he can catch up even a distant falling echo of these strains, and temper their celestial harmony to the “ears of the groundlings,” who could not otherwise have heard them. Poetry will one day become one of the elements of life—a sixth sense more keen and important than all the rest.

“Ernst ist das Leben, heiter ist die Kunst.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Life is earnest, art is serene.”—SCHILLER.—ED.



But it is a noble dream, if a dream to elevate life itself into the spiritual clearness and ideality of Art. Deep and beautiful is the advice of Goethe, that we should "every day hear a little song, see a good picture, read some poetry, and, if possible, talk some sensible words," that we may thus cultivate a harmony of soul, which must eventually express itself in life; and so Montaigne's father used to awaken him in the morning by playing on the flute, in order that he might begin the day with cheerfulness, and one slight beam of beauty. Nevertheless if, as Goethe says, "what we do not *understand*, we do not *possess*," so the more poetry becomes a familiar household thing, garnered up in the hearts of the masses, not shut in libraries of the rich, the more necessary it is for us to *understand* it, unless indeed we regard it as the stars,

"Too high for knowledge, but how near for love!"

But to understand it is the office of æsthetics and criticism; and if there be any truth in what we have written, a noble office it is. Criticism is the hand-maiden to Art, the gentle and affectionate sister (philosophy), comprehending and knowing what poetry *feels* and *utters*. But this gentle sister has somehow or other fared most sorrowfully in this merry and moral England of ours: she has been bullied by her brother, snubbed by her enemies, ill-treated by friends, and poisoned by quacks. Her brother, poetry (in the form of heaven-descended, unsuccessful genius, in turned-down shirt-collars), has bullied her in unmea-

<sup>1</sup> *Vicia Perpetua.*

sured terms ; " *cold* criticism," " rules cramping genius," " envy of critics," etc., have been the most courteous terms. With these ingrates who thus ill-use their critics out of a resentful sense of their own short-comings, we shall argue the point about " rules cramping genius," or " learning damping poetic fire," previous to our introducing them to their high-soul'd sister in Germany, from whose Minerva-head streams a light somewhat differing from that of the Minerva-press.

We are aware that in obscure corners originality is supposed to be obtainable through ignorance alone ; knowledge, criticism, etc., being mere weights and obstructions to the free exercise of the poetic spirit. This does very well in rhetoric, indifferently so in logic. And then suppose we choose to reject the illustration of " weights " applied to learning, and substitute " wings " for it, is not the whole argument changed ? And yet an arbitrary illustration can never affect the truth of the thing. Men are the dupes of epithets. Affix an epithet to your neighbour's actions or sentiments, and they share the fate of the dog in the proverb, and are virtuously hanged. Call reason or understanding " cold," and they become, as by magic, degraded and brutified in the eyes of men ; while " warm " imagination or " exalted " fancy are revered by every turn'd-down collar in the kingdom. Epithets are thus made the weapons of bigotry, the shields of conventionality, and the watchwords of superstition !

We insist therefore on an inspection of the epithet " cold " when applied to the understanding ; we insist

on knowledge, rules of art, etc., being no longer called "damps, weights, or obstructions," until further examination. It is merely a dispute about words, as all disputes indeed are; men not looking steadily at the thing, but looking only at their conception of it, and each man insisting on the other seeing with his eyes. Mere verbal learning, or what is usually known as academic learning, can certainly be of no great use to the poet, if he also share the academic reverence for trivialities in " $\mu$ ." Learning, in the common acceptation of the word, is the driest, barrenest dust that can be shaken from long-shelved folios, and collected under the skull; but here again that shifty Will-o'-the-wisp, epithet, has led us dancing into a bog, instead of the broad path of reality. Men have consented to call one thing alone "learning," viz., the Greek and Roman literatures. In effect, however, there is learning beyond this, and such, usually called knowledge, the poet *must* have, if he would gain the world's ear; and the better, if strengthened and refined by an acquaintance with the language and the almost perfect relics of antiquity. Learning is as oil poured upon water, which rests glittering at the top, and can be *shown* and its amount estimated, at a moment's notice; but unfortunately, without changing the condition of the water itself. Knowledge is as wine poured upon water, which cannot be so readily shown and separated, but which mingles with the water vivifying it with its own intense life, and changing it into quite another existence. Poets, mistake not oil for wine!

Shakespeare, it is possible, was unable to conjugate a Greek verb without bungling, but that he "was wise in all the wisdom of his time" can be doubted by none. His appetite for knowledge was insatiable, and "grew with what it fed on." Everything was welcome to him, high and low, and was turned to good account. How remarkably this was the case with Goethe we all know. That Homer, the Greek dramatists, Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Tasso, Chaucer, Milton, Spenser, Shelley, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Goethe, Schiller, etc., were all impressed with the necessity of mastering, as far as in them lay, all knowledge, is equally plain; for, in a word, how can he whose position is at the head of his age, be *behind* that age?

With regard to that theory invented by idleness and conceit—of rules cramping genius, the chilling effects of criticism, and the necessity for the artist's being ignorant of his art—how does this accord with past experience? Is not a great poem the work of years? Was Dante, who formed his language, careless of his art? Did he not see himself "growing grey" over his *Divine Comedy*? "Creation, one would think, cannot be easy," says Carlyle; "your Jove has severe pains and fire-flames in the head, out of which an armed Pallas is struggling!" Was Chaucer indifferent to the critical demands of his art?—was Spenser?—was Shakespeare? The biographies of poets give very explicit statements of the labour and study which their poems cost them. Ariosto was twelve years writing his *Orlando Furioso*, and after

it was published, travelled all over Italy to converse with the critics upon it, profiting by their advice; and it will live for more than twelve hundred years. Tasso had a scholar expressly to elucidate Aristotle's *Poetics*, and studied them with avidity; his own *Discorsi* on epic poetry show how long and carefully he had meditated the subject. Only look at the question for an instant, and it resolves itself. An artist has a certain aim; to attain this he must use certain means: is he to be ignorant of them for the better employment of them? He must not only ascertain correctly the nature, power, and limits of these means, but must apply them to his own wants. Now rules in poetry are nothing more than conclusions arrived at by critics for the best means of attaining this end.

But heaven-descended genius has one immense rock on which it reposes its contented ignorance—one never-failing argument—the *Greeks!* "The Greeks never wrote with the fear of critics before their eyes; they had no cold rules, which they were afraid to violate." Such is the confident announcement, such is their rock; unfortunately for them it is no rock, but a mere sand-hill converted into a rock by being viewed through the mist of ignorance—a mist favourable and familiar to weak eyes. This rock is scattered into air by these two facts—the Greeks had abundant scientific æsthetic treatises, and they had always a highly critical audience.

The history of Grecian æsthetics has been elaborately treated by Müller, Bode, Ruge, and

others;<sup>1</sup> and although time has left us little beyond the titles of works, yet they alone indicate the advanced state of the science; and when we consider the profound philosophical genius of the people, their acute susceptibilities, and their passionate love of Art, we may be assured that their treatises were not only full of deep speculation, but also of suggestive matter to the artist. One thing strikes us throughout Grecian Art, and that is, the consciousness of its art; the well-considered, elaborated, and calculated adoption of materials. Except in Homer, whom we regard, in spite of the critics, as bald (simple, if they will; but the simplicity of primitive poetry, not the forethought simplicity of Art), the most glowing burst of poetry with them has not a *spontaneous* look; and hence Goethe compared Greek Art to a volcano burning beneath a covering of ice; and this "coldness" has been universally felt; nor is the difference of religion and customs sufficient altogether to account for it, since even in sculpture (and that too in the purely human phases of it), which bears least visibly the imprint of a nation's spirit, a certain coldness strikes the beholder at first sight. This is indisputable, and we believe it to be greatly owing to the absence of that spontaneous air which ideal art must induce. These considerations render us very curious on the subject of their æsthetics.

<sup>1</sup> *Wile Müller, Geschichte der Theorie der Kunst bei den Alten* (a work much valued, but which we have been unable to consult); *Bode, Gesch. der Hellenischen Dichtkunst*, the introduction to which contains a short but elaborate account of the different critical theories; and *Ruge, Platonische Ästhetik*.

How early Art was regarded by them as an object of speculation, we have no trace. Scattered remarks upon its nature, end, and laws are to be found in their oldest poems; but in these we only find an artistic, not a philosophic comprehension of the subject. The philosophers, however, soon opened the field of inquiry, and their results were at length reduced by Pythagoras to mathematical principles. Pindar was instructed by Lasos, author of the oldest work on music possessed by the Greeks;<sup>1</sup> and Democritus wrote no less than ten treatises, which comprehend almost the whole region of Art—viz., on Poetry, Rhythmus, Harmony, Beauty of the Epic, Homer, Song, Diction, Painting, and Perspective. Democritus was the first who opposed the opinion that poetry was a mere facility, which, like rhetoric, could be learned by repeated exercise; showing it to be a madness (*μανία*), a being possessed by the God (*ἐν θεῷ*), the obeying of an indwelling, but unconscious and divine impulse;<sup>2</sup> “for they do not,” says Plato,<sup>3</sup> “compose according to any art which they have learnt, but from the impulse of the divinity within them.”

Plato's æsthetical views the reader will see collected and expounded in the before-mentioned work of Ruge. We shall only mention the profound insight

<sup>1</sup> *Suidas*, 227.

<sup>2</sup> Hor., *Ad Pisonem*, 295; Cicero, *De Divinatione*, ii. 34. This is the *φῆσι θεάσθοντα* (Dio. Chrys., 35), *ἐνθουσιασμοῦ καὶ λόγου πνεύμα* (Clem. Alex.), which Democritus demands of the real poet, and which he, like Plato, expressed by poetic madness.

<sup>3</sup> *Ion*.

indicated in the passage at the end of the "Symposium," that "the foundations of the tragic and comic arts are essentially the same;" we say indicated, because he has stated it so loosely, that we cannot accept it in his words. The tragic of necessity contains within itself the comic *capability*; but the converse does not hold. Passion which suffers, and imagination which irradiates every side of things, saturating the surface as well as piercing to the core, can, from their very intensity and illumination, comprehend in their glance both the congruous and incongruous, the eternal and the accidental, the earnest and the ludicrous. But wit, which sees only the resemblances of surface, or humour, which sees only the incongruities of things, by not *undergoing*, not seeing all, but only a part of things, can never produce the tragic. For when the congruous or the earnest are known, the incongruous and ludicrous are (according to Kant) also known with them; the departure from the one gives the other. Yet the congruous is not the *other* aspect of the incongruous, nor does the conception of the latter *involve* the former; for the congruous has but one form, the incongruous many. The tragic poet then can be comic; for, conceiving the grandeur of action, he can also conceive the littleness of action: but the comic poet does not necessarily include the tragic, inasmuch as the conception of the littleness of an action does not positively include a clear, pure conception of the grandeur of it.

The treatises of Aristotle and Longinus are too



well known to be here spoken of. But Greece perished—the Porch and the Academy were no more; and from that period until 1729 (when nature gave birth to one of her giant pioneers, known to men as Gottlob Ephraim Lessing), æsthetics slept the long sleep. Dim ghosts occasionally “visited the glimpses of the moon,” proclaiming themselves the unmistakable “buried majesty of Denmark,” but they vanished at the cockcrow of inspection. Without waging a bloody and heroic war with the already slain, we may at once assert that such a thing as æsthetical criticism was not known, and that the treatises then believed in are buried beneath the weight of their own dust. One fact they do represent, viz., that criticism has always been co-existent with Art; and now the question resolves itself into this second one—whether it be better for the artist that criticism should be good or bad? If bad, then stick to your Batteux and Blairs; if good, then must it be sought elsewhere; and English echo answers “where?”

But here a no less remarkable question presents itself:—if Art has done without good criticism, so long, what need of it now? No one has put this question, and yet it is a very plausible one. We answer: because Art is the flower of its age; because it must *now* spring out of a different soil—a more critical and conscious one. The manifestations of Art in this century cannot possibly be the same as those of any other century; it must use other means, other formulæ, because its audience differ in ideas

from any other.<sup>1</sup> We take it to be the radical error of artists that they do not distinctly set before themselves not only their *object*, but the requisitions of the age. Accustomed to live among the works of the past, to breathe their atmosphere, and to consider them as perfection, their whole endeavour is to reproduce those types, which they do in a lifeless, soulless form. They forget that even in our most unfeigned admiration of those relics of antiquity, we always *make allowance* for the difference. We have no faith in their ideas, but we see that they themselves had, and it is enough; but when a modern would reproduce those types, he fails: first, and most signally, from a want of faith in the ideas he symbolises; and, secondly, from our resenting as an untruth, an impertinence, any resurrection of these ideas long buried in the grave of time. His chance of success is proportioned to the relation between the ideas of that time and ours. The true Greek ideas, for example, can never affect us: Those of the Middle Ages will do so more or less, but never completely. We are aware of the existing cant about the ancients, but are convinced that if the *Minerva* and the *Moses* of Michael Angelo were produced for the first time, by modern artists, precisely the same as they now are, all unprejudiced persons would award the preference to the *Moses*, though feeling both of

<sup>1</sup> Hence the above question is half answered. However we may admire Shakespeare, Spenser, Dante, etc., one thing is certain, that they fulfilled the critical demands of their age, not of ours; were their poems to appear to-morrow, they would be universally condemned as irregular, crude, and deficient in art. To us they are classics.

them to be incomplete. The connoisseurs, *i.e.*, those who know least but cant most about the matter, would of course detect the Grecism of the *Minerva*, and so award the preference because it was Greek.

The revival of Art is fondly talked of, passionately hoped, but the *means* are not so ready to hand. One proposes the abolition of "academies"; another, "severe study of the ancients"; a third, "protection and patronage of government," "*et omne quod exit in unum, præter remedium!*" We do not propose æsthetics as the panacea, but we do firmly believe it to be a very necessary ingredient; for, as we said, this is a critical and conscious age, and its Art must therefore inevitably partake of this spirit. "That which a work of art," says Hegel, "beyond the immediate enjoyment, in these days, should satisfy in us, is our *judgment*, because we bring under our scrutiny and contemplation the subject-matter (*Inhalt*) and its representative forms or symbols (*Darstellungsmittel*), and the fitness or unfitness of the one to the other. We ask, is the subject good? is the treatment good? and are they mutually conformable? Hence the philosophy of Art is, in our times, much more necessary than it ever was in those times when Art was sufficient in itself as Art."<sup>1</sup>

That the German poets are critical poets no one doubts; and although doubts are expressed as to the genius of Goethe and Schiller by some few, gifted with an appreciation of works whose language they do not understand, yet, waving all comparisons, this

<sup>1</sup> *Æsthetik*, b. i. 16.

one truth remains:—they sufficed for their country and epoch; they were the artistic expression of the time, and have had all the influence which poets can attain. This is something; it is worth studying, even if Art be dead. It may be very plausible to talk about the "infancy of nations" being favourable to Art, and of civilisation "by enlarging the understanding, thus weakening the influence of imagination," but we hold it to be altogether false and rhetorical. Was the age of Pericles, of Augustus, of Louis XIV., of Elizabeth and James, and of Europe after the French revolution—was any of these the "infancy of nations"? Were not all the intellectual faculties then in as vigorous play as now? Were not science and philosophy equally at work? What then becomes of the argument about "infancy of nations"? Or, setting these aside, if Art be, as we believe, a social mission; if it be the expression of the age under its emotive and beautiful phases, will it not *vary* with the age? If it was "imaginative" then, may it not now receive another impress, and still effect its mission? All Ideas are not equally favourable to Art, though, when dominant, they must be equally expressed by it, as indeed they are not equally favourable to humanity. For instance, the dominant Idea of the eighteenth century (*i.e.*, that portion which is known as the eighteenth by reason of its dominant Idea, for towards the close of it began the new era) was analysis, most fatal of all to Art, inducing "scientific accuracy of statement," whereby it becomes didactic, and ever on the verge of prose;

inducing, moreover, the great attention to details, to passages, cramp-versification, and "sober reasonableness." On the other hand, synthesis admits and demands that high mystic expression which feels more than it comprehends, and includes all particulars in the general; hence its intensity. What are the poetic names? In France, Voltaire, J. B. Rousseau, La Motte, Delille, etc. In England, Addison, Pope, and that school. In Germany, Hagedorn, Ramler, Gellert, etc. In Italy, Metastasio. Everywhere mediocrity, mere form and good sense; no high poetic worth, no intense passion, no gospel tidings are to be read there. It was not a poetic epoch; but how comes it, if our theory of the poetic Idea be false, that there was not in all this century one man who could redeem it? Man, they say, draws his inspiration from nature, from his own heart; if so, why did he remain uninspired during this century? Surely nature's face was as fresh, as varied, and as beautiful as ever; surely man's heart trembled with passions, his breast swelled with aspirations, and there was woman with her affections; why then did no singer arise and pour forth a strain, which we and all the world would recognise as greatly poetic? Because, we repeat, man *draws his inspiration from Ideas*; those of the eighteenth century were not suited to a poetry different from the one they brought forth—clever, correct, material. Yet the century was great in science, because analysis is a great idea for science; hence it saw Newton, Bernouilli, Clairaut, Maclaurin, Napier, D'Alembert, Laplace, Euler, Lagrange,

Humboldt, Herschel, Fourcroy, Galvani, Franklin, Lavoisier, Haüy; and these were great intelligences, and their work was great for humanity. At the same time, the poets who then wrote expressed the spirit of their age, and sufficed for it; that they do not suffice for ours, although detached sentiments, lines, and bits of nature still delight us, is sufficiently apparent.

This, then, being a critical, conscious age, its artists must be critical to fulfil its demands; and æsthetics we take to be one of the means of elevating it out of the "slough of despond," although it must likewise be emancipated from "Commerce" and be placed on its own high pedestal, with real priests at its altars and real faith in its worshippers;—so long as the "commerce of sweet sounds" is the jingling of guineas, little can be hoped for. But that æsthetics, however studied, is able to create artists, we do not for an instant imagine; it can but direct the artistic genius. Æsthetics is the philosophy of Art, and "philosophy," says Solger, "can create nothing; it can only *understand*. It can neither create the religious inspiration nor the artistic genius; but it can detect and bring to light all that is contained therein."<sup>1</sup> To create a new and commensurate Art is not in the power of Æsthetics; that must come from the new birth of an era; there must be the inspiring Ideas; but as in all the secondary stages men are employed in developing the many phases of the Idea, æsthetics, when perfected, will necessarily direct their energies into the right channels.

<sup>1</sup> Solger, *Æsthetik*, p. 9.

And this leads us to the indisputable position of æsthetics; if it be of no assistance to the artist (which we deny), it will render intelligible Art as Art, as well as all existing works; it will enable us fitly to judge of the relics of the past and the productions of the present, and it opens an inquiry in the psychological department of the very highest interest. For those then do we demand a consideration of the subject.

In France, although rapid strides have been taken, and some notable results elicited, it still remains in a fragmentary state. The works of Quatremère de Quincy, however, are equally admirable for their clearness and profundity; yet we believe he is the only systematic thinker who has yet published works of importance. St. Beuve, George Sand, and others evidence profound insight, but only in parts; a whole is still wanting. In Germany it is received as one of the branches of philosophy; has its professors, its treatises and systems, and every man, woman, and child is more or less imbued with it. Lessing, Winckelmann, Herder, Goethe, Schiller, Kant (*Kritik der Urtheilskraft*), Schelling, Novalis, the Schlegels, Tieck, Jean Paul, Solger, Hegel, are among the great stars which illumine this atmosphere; but their separate endeavours are too comprehensive to be even mentioned here. Solger and Hegel may both be consulted for the historic portion. Lessing's works, though mostly polemical and directed against the French poetry, yet contain much that is true and admirable for all times; especially the *Laocoon*, which was translated by Mr.

Ross, of Edinburgh, an inestimable book to English readers. Winckelmann's works are much *spoken* of, unfortunately little read. The French translation of his *History of Art* is unfaithful, and no English translation, we believe, exists.<sup>1</sup> Jean Paul's *Vorschule* does not pretend to be systematic, but it contains some charming writing, illustration, and close argument. His remarks on wit and humour are well worthy of study. Solger we can recommend, but to those who are content to view the matter in its abstract logical shape unrelieved by applications and illustrations. The essays of Schiller, though rather repulsive at first, from their Kantian rigidity of form, yet contain important ideas, and occasionally go to the very depths of the subject.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *History of Ancient Art*, trans. by G. H. Lodge. 2 vols. London, 1881.—ED.

<sup>2</sup> See in particular "Ueber das Pathetische;" "Ueber Naive, u. Sentimentalische Dichtung;" "Ueber das Erhabene;" and "Ueber den gebrauch des Gemeinen und Niedrigen in der Kunst." [Vide English translation of Schiller's Works, vol. vi. (Bohn's Library).—ED.]

[Hegel's *Ästhetik* has never been fully translated, but there are several sectional translations well worth consultation. Dr. J. S. Kedney's *Hegel's Æsthetics* (Scott, Foresman & Co., Chicago) is an exposition of the whole *Ästhetik*. Dr. W. Hastie's *Philosophy of Art* (Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh) is a translation of Michelet's summary of Hegel. Bryant's work (Appleton & Co., New York) is a translation of Part II. The handiest book of all is Bosanquet's *The Introduction to Hegel's Æsthetics* (Kegan Paul).

Of late years there has been a considerable increase in the literature of *Æsthetics*. Historical views of the subject may be obtained from Prof. Knight's *Philosophy of the Beautiful* (2 vols., Murray, 1891) and Bosanquet's *History of Æsthetic* (Sonnenschein, 1892), at the end of which volume there is a full Bibliography.—ED.]



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